JOCELYN'S MISTAKE.

VOL. I.

JOCELYN'S MISTAKE.

BY

MRS. J. K. SPENDER,

AUTHOR OF

"PARTED LIVES," "BROTHERS-IN-LAW,"
"HER OWN FAULT,"

&c. &c.

"Oh what a tangled web we weave,
When first we practise to deceive."
Marmion.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1875.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

BOOK I.

JOCELYN'S MISTAKE.

PROLOGUE.

IT was a warm day for the beginning of June —one of those days which are so rare in our English climate, and which seem to be given to us as reminders of possible Edens. The heat had come so suddenly that outside Dyneford Park the cows were dozing, and the sheep browsing lazily in the meadows, whilst the grasses in the hayfields were already in their Summer glory, gleaming in tangled hollows like silver feathers, and enlivening the dusty lanes with their cloudy sprays. But in the avenue of the park all was cool and quiet. It was a thick avenue, and the glimmer of the

sunbeams sparkled amongst the network of the trees, and then disappeared altogether where the fresh leaves, heaped pile above pile in the vast superfluity of their beauty, excluded all light in the richness of their shadow.

A lover of magnificent timber might have found an infinite variety of vegetation at Dyneford. Some one with an eye for artistic effect must surely have planted those elms in the avenue which had tempted the rooks to choose their giant tops for the building of their nests, to say nothing of other more distant trees beyond the fair expanse of undulating turf—acacia, light-leaved birch, sycamore, and horse-chestnut, with larches, and a mountain ash amongst the dark juniper bushes.

I doubt if the more fashionable shrubs of modern arboriculture would have looked to any greater advantage by the side of these old favourites than an Italian flower-garden, with brilliant geraniums and scentless calceolarias, primly cultivated in tile-like groups of colour, would have looked in contrast with the dear old-fashioned flowers which were in close prox-

imity to Dyneford House. The languishing daffodils, the little pink hepaticas, and the purple crocus-cups, which months before had been filled with yellow powder, had now given place to tall white lilies with golden centres, blue campanulas, and pansies, with clusters of sweet peas, lupines, pinks, and other homely specimens which the "bedding-out" system can never wholly eclipse. And though the westeria and yellow jasmine had ceased to blossom, there was an abundance of honeysuckle, with early flowering roses, clinging about the entrance to the shady matted hall of a building which was famed for its picturesqueness, in spite of its conglomeration of architectural styles. What though the quaint Elizabethan windows were spoiled by the innovation of ugly Georgian ornaments, and what though there was in one place a pointed gable, and in another the heresy of a Venetian shutter, yet there was a beauty of its own in the strange-looking polyglot façade. Time had dealt so tenderly with the old grey stone, adorning it so industriously with rich stains of yellow and brown, and

hiding its deficiencies with overgrowing lichen, that even where the honeysuckle and roses did not grow, you forgot the impertinent intrusion of some modern plate glass in an oriel window, or an arch where it had no possible business to appear, for the sake of the solid masonry which bewitched you with its trickery of colour.

The day and the place seemed to be suggestive of passive repose—a repose which was perfectly in keeping with the attitude of the mistress of Dyneford as she reclined on the sofa of a room from which the light had been excluded, the inertia produced by her lymphatic temperament having made it easy for her to be credited with a chronic invalidism. This lady, who was generally known as "Mr. Delmott's second wife," having scarcely enough character to lay claim to a title of her own, was still a pretty woman, whose unusual amount of silliness had been compensated in her youth by an unusual amount of soft blond beauty.

There was something not unpleasant still in her gentle, pussy-like rotundity. She was indolent, harmless, and good-hearted enough, with a

tendency, like the feline tribe, to sleep a good deal, and generally to warm herself in luxurious places. It was usual to make excuses for the passionless inanity, as well as for the ineffable selfishness, of her character, by concluding that they were derived from bodily infirmity; but this fiction of ill-health had not made her, as yet, indifferent to personal adornment.

Mrs. Delmott was lavishly dressed, being never forgetful of her habiliments, but manifesting, like the pussy-cat, a special carefulness for the smoothness of her paws and the sleek polish of her fur. Just now, however, she stirred uneasily in her sleep, and opened her pale blue eyes with a gesture of surprise—for a sharp, sudden cry, followed by an unusual scuffle, was heard from the library—the room in which her husband, who was twenty years older than herself, spent the greater part of his time.

In the library, at that moment, stood Mr. Delmott, a man with a small figure and clean-cut head, with eyes shrewd and grey, and with a well-preserved complexion, somewhat waxy in its colouring, which gave to his face the ap-

pearance of a cameo. He had grey hair, which waved from a slightly impending brow; and he had usually a suave manner, but was not suave at present. His attitude was indeed somewhat undignified, and nervousness contended with anger in the expression of his usually calm face as he held a stick threateningly over the shoulders of a dark-eyed, olive-skinned boy—a boy of about seven years of age, slight and delicate in form, and who shook with evident tremor at the prospect of blows which might be in store for him.

There was a glare in the child's eyes, betraying the untamed disposition, as the hot blood mounted to his face, and the red lip was angrily protruded. But terror predominated, and passion was subdued with a sort of unchildike prudence. The stick was raised ready to descend, when the sound was heard which had interrupted Mrs. Delmott's nap. A girl, about two years older than the boy, and dark in colouring like himself, who had been apparently conning her lesson in a shady nook of the same apartment—a girl with long legs, and arms to

match, but lithe of movement, straight and supple, with eyes large and bright, like those of other unfledged creatures, and with lips curved so scornfully as to reveal the little rows of white teeth—darted suddenly from the corner where her existence had been forgotten, with the breath coming fast through her dilated nostrils, seized the stick in her right hand, wrenched it with a swift movement from her father's hold, and, catching it under her left arm, flew to the window with the agility of a squirrel. The window was open, and there was a swift whizzing sound as the instrument of torture alighted somewhere among the evergreens beneath it.

Before the astonished father could recover from the surprise which his daughter's unwonted violence had caused him, the child had herself followed the stick through the same convenient window, and clinging with her hands and feet to the branches of a vine which adhered to the old walls on this side of the house, had swung herself slowly down and disappeared—Mr. Delmott holding his breath the while, lest by any chance exclamation he

might render the hazardous descent more perilous. He held it still, as if fascinated or haunted by the scorn of his daughter's curved lips; even when he recovered from his astonishment, to find that both culprits had escaped him, and he was alone.

Then he gave a half-sigh as he remembered that it was the girl who was always rash and brave, and the boy the weaker and more timid, though, at the same time, the more underhand and manœuvring of the two.

"He told me a lie, and a lie ought not to go unpunished. He has so many volatile instincts, but he is not really vicious. Joyce has the most of the mother in her after all," he said, with another sigh, as he tried to think the matter out.

There were books everywhere in the room—the accumulations of a lifetime—books on the shelves, on the tables, and even piled on the floor; but books could not help him to solve the knotty problem. Ralph Delmott was a scholar who shrank from any form of worry or disturbance quite as much as his indolent wife

shrank from it. He was by no means cruel, but with humanity he had little sympathy. Theories stood him instead of sympathy; and in accordance with a theory he had purchased Dyneford, it being one of his ideas to establish a family which might so live as to do credit to his name, and to maintain the order of gentlehood in his country.

Sir Walter Scott, he sometimes remembered with a pang, had had much the same theory, and had singularly failed in carrying it out. But Ralph Delmott did not mean to fail. His daughters he set little store by, but eight years before, on the coming of a man child, he had promised himself the gratification of his most cherished wishes. The boy was a clever boy——clever enough to be Lord Chancellor, or perhaps Prime Minister, the father had sometimes thought in the pride of his new possession; but there was one important drawback, the child would not work. The little marionette very quickly grew troublesome—it had tastes of its own; and at ten years of age it was no longer a puppet, to be treated according to a precon-

ceived idea, but the possessor of a separate will, which threatened to interfere with the father's pet selfishness. Idleness had already led to prevarication, and successful prevarication had resulted in bolder lying. Still Ralph Delmott did not despair. He did not suppose that a boy of this sort could be induced to apply himself to dry and irksome study by the mere force of soft persuasion and gentle words. There was another course to be adopted, and that commended itself to Mr. Delmott's judgment, as it had commended itself to the approbation of wiser heads in England. He saw nothing brutal or tyrannical in the old system of securing habits of application. On the contrary, he was an advocate for rigid discipline, and, in spite of Joyce's interference, he meant to enforce it.

Amongst the evergreens beneath the window, the two children met—the girl breathless and agitated, the boy victorious and ungrateful. For that day at least he hoped

that he should be freed from anything disagreeable. It mattered little that his father's anger would be transferred to another delinquent. The child had always treated his sister with undisguised scorn, and now that the interference which had helped him in his need was over, he was only anxious to escape from all unpleasant consequences.

"He didn't hurt you," she panted—"I wouldn't let him. But, oh! Hugh, it was so mean of you to tell him that story!"

"Don't make any more mischief—you always make it worse for me," he answered, in a tone of injury, shaking off her eagerly proffered embrace.

"Oh! Hugh," she remonstrated again, in a half inaudible voice, with a look of premature sadness in her face, which her brother was utterly incapable of appreciating. It was so natural for the girl to have something to cling to, that she was ready to forgive the sting of his answer; and yet she could not understand the shallow nature of the boy whose elastic spirits were already rising above his trouble.

"Don't bother me with your 'Oh, Hugh!'" he repeated, irritably pushing her away. "I wonder what will become of me if you're always interfering? Girls would never be happy if they hadn't their fingers in everybody's pie;" and rather proud than otherwise of his ill-timed burst of rhetoric, he skulked towards the avenue without any reproaches of conduct for leaving his sister—a wretched little embodiment of misery—to scramble through the evergreens, panting like a hunted hare, and, regardless of any amount of mischief in the way of soiled blossoms and broken-down branches which her ruthless feet might accomplish. She was bound for the old cedars, which adorned a separate plantation fenced in from the garden—cedars so antique, and so majestic in their growth, that they threw all the other trees into comparative insignificance, and the master of the property had specially considered them in paying a fabulous sum for the Dyneford estate. The storms of centuries had deprived these cedars of a few of their branches, but they were ruggedly grand even in their mutilation, and there was a thoroughbred look about the

remaining gnarled old boughs which the pines and maples in the so-called "wilderness" surrounding them had been hitherto unable to equal. The child, who could climb these trees like a squirrel, little heeding the soiled clothes which might be torn in the ascent, laughed a little to herself when she reached her favourite retreat.

"They won't come after me here," she thought. "What cowards they are!—and Hugh is like the rest of them!"

It was not so dangerous as it seemed to hide herself amongst the dusky branches, and to lie *perdu* for a little while, till lesson-time was over. It was a cold and dreary place, but Joyce Delmott had a faculty for enduring discomfort, and there was a spice of Bohemianism in the defiant little heart, which was so alien to the nature of most of the people about her, that they had long ago given up attempting to cope with her. At first her senses were soothed by the fragrance of the damp earth, the smell of the wet leaves where no sunshine had reached them, and the luxury of stretching her length of limb on a natural rocking-chair; and then

her memory was roused afresh by the recollection of Hugh's ingratitude.

"It comes of being a girl," she thought hopelessly to herself, the disgrace of girlhood having already been a matter to her for much earnest and anxious thought, and the idea of womanhood having hitherto been intimately associated with all her notions about her stepmother. Not that Mrs. Delmott attempted to manage her, for, having discovered that Joyce had a rebellious nature, not easily to be subjugated, the lady had long ago surrendered the task, and contented herself with constant complaints about that "shocking child's temper." But the vigorous energy of the girl and her masterful will contributed to the dislike she had conceived for her father's second wife—a dislike which was ripening into one of the bitter pertinacious antagonisms of childhood. She did not dislike her father, but she shivered at the thought of meeting him, though not from any physical dread. He would, she knew, speak to her in a terribly polite voice, which would seem to chill the marrow of her bones.

If he had only hit her—a box on the ears, for instance (once he had given her such a blow in mistake—a blow that had made her blood tingle, and made her see odd colours—she was only glad she had had it in mistake for Hugh) it would have hurt her much less than his continual frostiness. But no, they would not beat her; they would only pelt her with words, shut her up in a dark room, or feed her on dry bread, and she preferred to fast altogether in the freedom of the open air.

So the hours passed slowly by till the evening came on, and till the edges of the leaves in the trees which surrounded her seemed to melt in the glow of the vivid hues which were gathering in the sky. She knew what was passing outside the "wilderness." In another half-hour the sky would be throbbing with light and colour, and the sun would be sinking, a great ball of fire, through the clouds of purple and gold, silently, like a soul dismissed from the world to solve the mysteries of the unknown. The child was tired of keeping still. Her love of the beautiful overcame her dread of discovery,

and creeping from her hiding-place, she watched the dazzling pageant till it suddenly disappeared, and till the sapphire seas, and the lakes of carmine, were all blotted out, and only a fire-flush left in the west. Then a dull cloud seemed to settle near the horizon, like a curtain that had been drawn slowly for the night. The silence, the shadows, and the evening darkness appalled her. She began to think of the spirits that are with us, though unknown to sight and sense—phantasms which she rather liked, and which peopled her solitude, but which frightened her in a place that had a touch of weirdness in it. There were mystical, eerie sounds, as the wind began to rise. The elm groaned, the pine creaked, and the ash-tree seemed to shudder, whilst Joyce's heart quickened with so unusual a rapidity that she was really relieved when she heard the click-clack of thick boots on the ground near her. What was it?" She crouched among the bushes, thankful when she found the footsteps were those of the nursery-governess, and of the nurse, who were out unusually late in search for herself.

"I'm certain she's somewhere amongst them trees, and I'm dead-beat with looking for her. Like mother like child! I shan't go no further," said the latter, settling herself on the trunk of one of Joyce's favourite trees. It seemed like a desecration of the cedars, and yet the child was really thankful that they had stopped close to her, that she might have a sense of human nearness.

"Was there something queer about the mother?" asked the governess. "You must know all about it, for you were here when he brought her home."

"Don't you see that foreign look in Miss Joyce's eyes?" answered the nurse, in a mysterious tone. "Her proper name ain't Joyce, any more than the lad's is Hugh. Jocelyn—Hugo, that's what they were both called, only the master don't like to hear the names now."

"And so Miss Joyce takes after her mother?" repeated the governess, still interrogatively, and remembering perfectly well how some one had told her that Mr. Delmott's first wife had been a dark-haired woman from Provence, not

at all suited to him in point of age, and still less suited to him from the fact that, though Gabrielle de Fontarque prided herself on her high descent, the De Fontarques had always borne an ill name in the country, and Gabrielle's grandfather—who, to show his contempt for religious rites, had insisted upon being buried in a mausoleum in his grounds, with his sword beside him—had been a byword during his lifetime amongst the ignorant peasants, for his love of extortion, his contempt of all law, and his unexampled ferocity. The girl had been educated in a convent near Paris, and Mr. Delmott had prided himself on accomplishing a good work when he rescued the orphan from the old château, which seemed to be like a prison to her, and where she had been confided to the tender mercies of uncles, who, though they prided themselves on being noble, fraternized with the people round them, ate enormously, and drank largely, and were little better than haughty, handsome, half-educated savages. They had willingly parted with a charge which had hampered them, to the Eng-

lishman who had the reputation of being rich, keeping back from him the fact that there had been already a story afloat concerning Gabrielle, which was destined to come upon her husband at last with the suddenness of a thunderclap.

The governess had heard all this, with a fair embellishment of fiction, but had kept her knowledge to herself, and intended to keep it still, as she said aloud,

"I wonder which of the children is most like the mother?"

"Both of them," answered the nurse, oracularly. "Master Hugh's the very model of her when she came home at first; he's worth two of his sister, to my taste, now, with that bonnie face and blythe tongue of his; but, take my word for it, he'll come to no good. As to Missy, she's the image of the poor lady as she was at last. Often and often I've seed her clenching her little fists, and then I've thought of that poor half mad thing wandering about in the garden, with a pretty black lace sort of a hood hanging round her face, her cheeks as white as dark cheeks like hers could be, and

her two eyes glittering like stars; and there she would walk up and down, up and down, till it made you giddy to see her. The master had got to hate her by that time; as to *her*, you could see her shiver whenever he came near her. Still I never believed the things they said."

"What things?" asked the governess, impatiently.

"I told you that I never believed 'em, and it 'ud be as much as my place is worth to repeat them," answered the nurse, suddenly recollecting herself. "And then she was such a noble, generous creature, when she came at first, one couldn't think of her in connection with anything wicked. She used to have such winning ways of her own, though it was easy to see she didn't care much for the master; do what he might, he couldn't please her, and there would be a blank look in her face at times, as if she were looking for something missing. And before the end came, it made me that low to see her. When she were tired of walking, she'd sit and dream and dream. I think I see her now, with a bit of a baby's cap in her

hand, looking as if she couldn't bear the sight of it."

"Was it true that when she was delirious it all came out?"

"*What* came out?—what do I know?" repeated the woman, evasively. "He had her portrait taken down when she was dead, poor lady! Sometimes I think he can't abear to look at Miss Joyce's face, because there's a look in it that minds him of her mother. Talk of crying—that poor soul would cry till it used to bring my heart into my mouth to hear her. And always one name—" And then the servant lowered her voice, and they spoke with bated breath.

The child strained her ears to listen, but the voices sank into whispers. It did not much matter; the poison had done its work. Jocelyn had been early impressed with the terrible reality of death, and had a dim recollection of having been taken to see a familiar face laid out in strange stillness in a darkened room, when the sun had been shining, and all the birds singing. She had been hitherto carefully

shielded from all foreign influences, and had not been allowed even to learn her mother's native tongue. But she inherited all the passionate tendencies of the sunny South, and her heart was now beating with suppressed passions, though there was a puzzled look of pain in her eyes.

With the quickness of perception which was a special faculty of hers, she had quickly pieced together parts of the disjointed story, supplying the links which were missing. She had heard that her mother had been celebrated for her beauty, and had herself a faint remembrance of the dark eyes, of a bewildering size and shape, which had turned the brain of the matter-of-fact Englishman, and had tempted him to fasten a yoke round his neck which had never ceased to gall and irritate him till the day of his young wife's death. More than this, she had already suspected that there had been dissensions between her father and her mother—a dismal thing for a child to suspect, when she does not wish to judge hardly of either parent. But now, for the first time, she resented, with a

new soreness of feeling, the supposed ill-treatment of her young mother, and intuitively connected the history of the past with the barrenness and dulness of her own everyday life. Jocelyn was already unconsciously given to metaphysical reflection, choosing, child-like, as matters of wonder, the unanswerable puzzles which perplex many a soul first waking into consciousness. Had she come to years of discretion, she would infallibly have asked questions; but, being only a child, she suffered in silence. She was for ever endowing others with her own ideal sensibilities, and now she shrank for the first time from the thought of the pains which her mother might have been called upon to endure. Where was that unknown mother now? She gathered courage to whisper her name, and to listen breathlessly for an answer. There was only the murmur of the wind, as it sounded eerily amongst the trees. The darkness was already closing in, and her former fears began to assail her. She suddenly made up her mind to creep up into her bedroom, but not to sleep—she would endeavour to lie awake and mature her

plans. Hitherto she had been content with hiding herself for hours; and the household was so accustomed to these constant disappearances that very little pains had been taken to track her. But she now determined that the next time she had occasion to hide herself, she would endeavour to escape altogether. She would cut off her hair if necessary, and dress herself in her brother's clothes. She was just considering the practical difficulty of saving sufficient money for the journey to London, as she went wearily upstairs, when she was roused by hearing long-drawn sobs, and other audible sounds of distress, issuing from the room which she shared with her little half-sister, and her thoughts took a sudden turn. For there, inconsolable in her white bed, nestled the four-year-old baby-toy who was usually Jocelyn's idol and pet, but who for the time had faded out of her remembrance, her rose-bud cheeks bedimmed with tears and her amber curls in piteous dishevelment.

"Naughty Nurse—put baby in corner cos she wouldn't go to bed without Joyce. Other

people's nurses much gooder than Elsie's nurse. Elsie lubs Joyce much better than eberyone else lubs her. Dood Joyce, not naughty Joyce," was the explanation which instantly scattered to the winds all the elder sister's deep-laid projects of vengeance.

Joyce could never run away from Elsie—Joyce, who went to sleep that night in fresh bonds of slavery, murmuring vows of repentant allegiance to the ungrateful Hugh, and the tyrant Elsie, and whose young heart began dimly to understand the infinite truth of love underlying all the riddles of the universe. And the nurse, coming in with a candle half an hour afterwards, smiled to herself as she saw the golden brown cheek of the truant in close contact with the rose-hued white one.

"So long as she has Miss Elsie to comfort her, she'll make herself happy in spite of everything," said the woman, who had lived so long in the family, and who had seen enough to make her feel deep pity for the father, whose temper was constitutionally irritable, and who, in striving to take upon himself at times the

trying position of teacher to his children, was imbuing them with a fear of him which did him injustice. Was it the experience of her master's early married life which had made him so unfortunately ashamed of all signs of natural affection, or was it that in the absence of all demonstration he had succeeded in crushing the feelings themselves? She was quite unable to settle the question—she only remembered that at one time there had seemed to be no deficiency of tenderness in his nature.

CHAPTER I.

FOURTEEN years afterwards, on another June evening, the skies were again throbbing and pulsating with glowing light over the piece of water, which glistened like a sheet of molten gold in the midst of the greenery in Dyneford Park. The light penetrated into the hall, that was hung with antlers of red deer, and old suits of armour, and played on the windows of the octagon-room, which Jocelyn Delmott, without asking anybody's leave, had specially appropriated as her sitting-room. She had chosen to make this room her own, partly because of its heavy mullioned windows, whose picturesque casements had not been interfered with by any desecrating innovation of modern plate glass, and partly because of the ponderous

oak doors which still retained their iron hinges. Two of the largest windows were remarkable for some fine sixteenth century stained-glass; and the old book-shelves, with their musty volumes, which no one cared to touch but her father, were of carved oak, whilst the brackets which ornamented them supported bronze statuettes and porcelain vases. There were a few Cromwell chairs, and two or three valuable pictures on the walls—one Cuyp, one Kneller, and two Sir Peter Lelys, representing ladies with very low-necked dresses, and short curls on their foreheads; whilst, as if by a freak of contrast, on a pedestal in the corner, there was an exquisite marble statue—the Magdalen of Canova. And, to add to the heterogeneous character of the apartment, there was a valuable old-fashioned oak table, on which lay reviews, pamphlets, uncut journals, and the last new books from Mudie's; whilst, close by it, a large garden hat, with an old plaid shawl and a bunch of wild flowers—the denizens of Jocelyn's favourite woods—were tossed in heedless confusion on an Indian marqueterie cabinet. On

that side of the room, which was partly shaded by the stained-glass windows, stood Jocelyn's easel—the easel which could tell of many hours of untold happiness, breaking the monotony of the girl's life—hours in which she sought relief from the dulness of the present, and in which she could forget the terrible restlessness which at times oppressed her in endeavouring to create for herself an imaginary world.

Of all the strange anomalies in the room the strangest seemed to be the conversion of this part of it into a painter's studio, fitted up as if the pursuit of art were intended to be a reality. There were the conventional lay figures, the plaster casts, and the studied drapery, looking so much like regular work, that it seemed a pity to miss the stimulating influence of the pipe-rack and the velvet smoking-cap, to complete the effect.

The artist was late at her work that afternoon. It was not long since she had unpacked her colours, fixed her easel, and sharpened her charcoal; and now she had only just begun to rub the pigments into her canvas—holding the

maul-stick in her light hand,—when her attention was attracted by the fact that the sun was already beginning to set, and she turned from her task with an impatient sigh. She had tried to exclude the sunshine by the corner she had chosen for her easel; but one bright ray of light would not be denied. It flickered in, and seemed to frolic, as if in scorn, on the work which she had just commenced, lighting up, at the same time, her great lustrous eyes, with their straight black brows; her hair, which had no vulgar glossiness about it, but which was dark and shadowy, with blue tints in its depths, and her complexion in which there was no roseate bloom, though it did not convey the impression of paleness.

Jocelyn Delmott was no longer quaint or uncomely, but hers was a face which invited attention by its singularity rather than by its loveliness. The black hair was coiled tightly on her head, and thrown back from her ample forehead, as if she disdained the idea of hiding anything. The shape of the head reminded one somewhat of a Greek statue, though her eyes were often

lighted with passionate flashes, which belonged not to that type of old-world calm. And the critics were right who said that her mouth was too firm, and her chin a trifle too square for regular beauty. In fact it was a face which spoke of a quick and ready brain, more ready to think sense than to rattle nonsense, and it was utterly devoid of those feminine touches which entice so many men to flirtation. Her dress was studiously, if not economically plain, but nothing could have been better in keeping with her supple figure than the soft black clinging material which showed the long lithe lines to perfection. Here again there was a touch of inconsistency, for beneath the high-cut dress, which had no other trimming than that of a neat linen collar, she wore a necklace composed of large amber beads, which had been brought to her from Rome, and which added to the foreign appearance already conveyed by the large dark eyes—eyes that sank all the rest of the face into comparative insignificance—and by the golden-brown skin which was tanned by constant exposure to the weather.

"Too late again—always interrupted!—it was the news about Hugo which put me out to-day," she sighed to herself, as she glanced with a look of discontent at her unfinished painting. The charm of it was gone. She had thought well of the vigorous outline a few minutes before, but now she was filled with a sudden distrust of its worth.

She had chosen Tennyson's "Dora" for her subject. The principal figure sat with its face hidden in its hands, and the attitude was one of strongly repressed feeling. Behind were the reapers—their day's labour ended—winding slowly one by one out of the field; whilst in the foreground were scarlet poppies and blue cornflowers, bathed in the brilliant glow of the western horizon. Jocelyn had wished to convey the idea of silence, intense and unbroken. But already in her own opinion she had failed in endeavouring to outline the perfect abandonment of the woman's attitude.

"It is useless!" she said to herself in the vehement way in which she was wont to reason about everything. "I can feel, but I can never

express my feeling. What am I but a dreamer driven by impulse, and dreamers are so seldom workers?"

She shut up her painting-box with a sharp click. One of the paroxysms of gloom which too often assailed her—for Jocelyn seemed to have a predisposition to sadness—was coming upon her now, as she rose from her work in a fit of petulant dissatisfaction, and prepared to collect the scattered articles of her dress.

In a state of chronic mutiny against her position as a woman, and with naturally but little inclination to all feminine tasks—eminently social by nature, and yet shut out, by the disabilities of women, from any adequate exercise of her highest faculties in the world without—no wonder that the girl was considered in her own family to be eccentric and self-absorbed. She had quirks and fancies which made her different from other girls, and now that the art drudgery, which for a time had begun to interest her, threatened to prove as unsatisfactory as other pursuits had proved, her heart sank down like lead in the bitterness of her disappointment.

"I thought there had been something worth doing to live for, and that was everything. But I was mistaken," she said despairing, to herself. "What am I but a dabbler in art—hot and hasty to finish, wearying and sickening of toil? If I believed in the possibility of success, or if anyone cared about it, it might be different; but, after all, what does it matter? Female composers and female artists are always third-rate."

"*If anyone cared about it.*" In those few words lay the explanation. Knowing no other women whose intellectual or artistic tastes could have fitted them for companionship with herself, she was fast drifting into that most wretched of all anomalies, a "*femme incomprise,*" the outcome, as Carlyle would call it, of a medley of causes, which had operated on her growth, just as the tree is the product of the sap which has impregnated it for successive generations. The women of her acquaintance, who laughed at her behind her back, and who unmercifully declared her to be "only fit for Colney Hatch," would have been furnished with some justification for their bitter words, if they could have witnessed

the vindictiveness with which Miss Delmott perversely set herself to destroy the work of the previous hour.

"What does it matter?" she repeated to herself; her mere volition could not become creative power, and surely there were enough useless daubs already in the world.

"At it again!" exclaimed a merry voice at her side. "Jocelyn, you are like Penelope—always destroying; in some previous state of existence you must have been a spider."

Jocelyn gave a scarcely-perceptible start. She was too accustomed to her sister's noiseless tread to wonder when Elizabeth glided impalpably into the room. But an inexpressible tenderness softened her face as she raised her eyes with a look of admiration at the newcomer. There was something dazzling in the apparition. For the folds of the girl's muslin dress, just open to display the white gleaming of her neck, seemed to focus the rays of evening light which were still streaming through the lozenge-shaped panes of the mullioned windows, and the bright face enframed in its halo of

golden hair was thrown into vivid relief by the rich background of the dark oak panelling. No wonder that the fair child of Mr. Delmott's second wife was already, in her first season, the recognized belle of the country round. If a creamy skin, with a flush which seemed rather like a reflected glow than hardly defined colour —a flush which came and went with the varying emotions of the speaker, and was seldom deeper than the pink transparency of a shell; if hair, of which the poets have sung, eyes which were like dog-violets in tint, and ripe red lips, could entitle a girl to lay claim to the "*dono infelice della bellezza*,"—then Elsie Delmott possessed it. Yet hers was the evanescent lustre of flesh and blood—a mere glory of colour, of which it would have been cruel for a skilful judge to prophesy a very limited duration. For, alas! the unusual lustre of those eyes, and the unnatural transparency of the complexion, were so many indications of the constitutional delicacy which Elsie had shown from her childhood. Jocelyn was not deceived by appearances. She knew her younger sister to be

intrinsically hectic and fragile-looking; even whilst she accorded her her share of that adulation which the girl claimed as her meed. She alone, with that penetrating and intuitive intelligence which was one of her characteristics, was aware that there was no real elasticity of health about Elsie's constant flow of spirits, and that her sister's very beauty was as the bloom on a peach, the impalpable down on a butterfly's wing—a thing that could not bear to be touched too roughly.

The girl was so accustomed to be noticed that she made a mock courtesy, and laughed when the most partial of all her slaves did not immediately answer her speech.

"Don't sit there eyeing me like a basilisk," she continued. "Do pick up those torn scraps of paper which are littering the floor; and put away those ugly sketches. I *would* paint something prettier while I was about it."

"Something prettier!" echoed Jocelyn, despairingly, with a little scorn in her tone, which was instantly repressed; "you would not have called it 'pretty,' even if I had succeeded. I am

afraid all my lessons to you on Wordworth's poetry have been forgotten. But you are right —I always fail. I wanted to represent that pecular light in the sky, which is neither day's nor night's—that far-off look of infinity just when——"

"Do stop talking Hebrew for once, you dear old maniac! I wish you would give up your long language," interrupted the girl, impatiently, suddenly uplifting her eyes, and opening them to their widest extent, with a trick which she had acquired through constant practice, though the unusual length of the lashes which shadowed the eyes could scarcely have escaped notice without that habit of raising and lowering them. "If you were to talk to me till Doomsday I should not know what you mean. And I really have no time to waste to-night. Don't you know I have to dress for Mrs. Sankey's ball?"

"And you have not yet put on your butterfly plumage for that important event," Jocelyn retorted, in a spirit of satire which was scarcely to be recognised under the tenderness of her manner.

"It's very well for you to laugh at my 'butterfly plumage,' but, as usual, you mean exactly the opposite of what you say. Whatever else you can't do, you certainly have taste in dress. Do you remember the night when you got those real ivy leaves from some place in the shrubbery, and twined them in between the long ruches on my *tulle* dress, and when everyone was asking me if the sprays were artificial? I never made such a success as I did that night. If you will tell Harper where the branches are to be found, before it gets quite dark, she will go and get some again for me now. I would rather have an excuse of sending her away, for you do my hair a thousand times better than she does."

"At this rate you will become an absolute tyrant," answered Jocelyn, with the same half-amused, half-compassionate expression of face. "It is your first season, certainly, but I wonder you are not tired of this vapid, tawdry society, in a second-rate provincial town. I' tired of it at once, but then I never had the sort of homage paid to me which you have had. Yet

the tasks of such a life are very monotonous."

"Ah, go on," said the girl, with a return of her former impatience. "We most of us 'compound the sins we are inclined to, by condemning those we have no mind to.' You sit here half the day, giving us none of your company in the drawing-room, attempting things which you say are, after all, beyond your power; and then you would lecture me for killing time, too, in my own way."

"A thing would not be worth attempting at all if it were not difficult," rejoined the elder sister, quietly; "but I don't blame you for enjoying yourself. I admire you for it. Aaron's rod, in spite of the miracle, could scarcely have bloomed in such a chilling atmosphere as we have about us here; and my heart feels as barren as that rod at times. I am not proud of it. On the contrary, I am rather ashamed. While we *are* in the world, we are surely meant to enjoy it. The fishes might as reasonably quarrel with the water, or the birds with the air, as we with the atmosphere in which we live, if we come to that. I only wonder that, if you *have*

made up your mind to live for fashion, and that kind of thing, you don't try to get the best the world can give you. You don't——"

"'Go up to town and have a taste of the real thing,' as you are always advising me to do," interrupted Elsie; "as if you did not know how often papa has said he would never allow our faces to become common in all the racket of a London season," she continued, with a little mimicry of her father's tone. "No, I am content with things as they are. I don't look down upon other people in your lofty way."

"Who says I look down upon anyone?" asked Jocelyn, her heart for the first time smiting her for a form of egotism essentially selfish, though it might be veiled under the specious excuse of self-culture.

"Who says?—why, everybody," laughed Elsie, in reply. "They don't know how nice you are; if they did, they wouldn't say it. Only the other day it was repeated to me that they called the eldest Miss Delmott 'so cold and so odd, they quite pitied people who had anything to do with her.' I tell you,

just because I want you to do yourself justice."

"'They' are only Dyneford people," remarked Jocelyn, deprecatingly, remembering how the ladies of the neighbouring country town had been eminently wearisome to her, with their stock phrases, their perennial commonplaces, and their small gossip about each other—how her mental verdict of each drawing-room visitor had been the same; there was "nothing in her," and how she had rather prided herself on seeming reticent, for fear she should break through the ice of her usual reserve. Perhaps it was not strange that she had been unpopular.

"But Dyneford is *our* world," pleaded the younger sister, with more common sense.

"Unfortunately it is; for in London I could have the best teaching that the other world could offer me," rejoined Jocelyn, in despair, recalling, with a sickening recollection, the time which she had wasted, the pages which she had covered with rubbishing poetry, the yards of canvas which she had sacrificed to inferior painting, and the hours which she had spent in

music which no one appreciated. What had been the use of it? she asked herself, in her present mood, conscious that her craving hunger after knowledge had never been satisfied, and that, though she had gathered in immeasurable materials from books, she had been unable, from want of sufficient training, to sift the grains of wisdom from them; conscious, too, that that hunger was beginning to yield to a kind of dissatisfaction in living to herself—a new doubt as to her own doings and actions.

"You are in one of your 'low' moods," remarked Elsie, a little pertly.

"And if I am," exclaimed Jocelyn, passionately, "was not the news about Hugo enough to make me low? If only I had had a father who would have made me his companion, and would have talked to me about things, I should never have hated Dyneford. But you know how it is. He divides women into two classes: bad, designing women, whose cleverness is only their curse; and good, obedient women, who are but little removed from the level of fools. Of course it is a part of the inheritance of his

daughters to know his opinions, and respect them to the smallest details. And yet, is it *my* fault that I inherit my father's own feelings? He is a proud man, with few intimacies, and bashful before strangers—is it *my* fault if I am a little reserved too? He never troubles himself about us, he does not seem to think that pain can reach him from the side of his daughters. But he is bound up in Hugo, and Hugo is disgracing us! The poor boy was always weak, and the 'old woman's' education, which he had at home under papa and our governess, has just helped to make him weaker still. He has been sent to Oxford, with absolutely no knowledge of the world; and I have no doubt he has given himself out as the heir of the Dyneford estate, comfortably ignoring the fact that the property is not entailed. He is the pet and prey of an objectionable set, who will do their best to help him to involve himself deeper and deeper. He has nothing but false friends. Oh, what am I to do?"

"It is not so bad as you think," answered Elsie, a little frightened at the eager torrent of

words, which was characteristic of her sister. "Hugo says he *means* to work steadily, and in a short time he will be of age—that will give him a fresh chance; but if you want to help him, why don't you try to give in a little more to papa's fancies?"

Jocelyn stopped in the excited walk which she had commenced up and down the room, and remembered that once—oh, prodigious!—Mr. Delmott had positively consulted her about the scapegrace, and that it was just possible he might consult her again. If so, the second opportunity should not be lost, as the first one had been. In a few months, as Elsie said, Hugo would be of age; and she fondly hoped that a good deal might be accomplished in those few months towards healing the breach between father and son.

She looked eagerly at her sister, and Elsie, seeing her advantage, continued, blushing a little through her transparent skin,

"Besides, you should really think a little of *me;* and there is one of my friends who particularly wants to be introduced to you."

"A little of you! And don't I think of you?" asked the elder sister, remembering how Elsie had already been forced to the painful consciousness that she was outgrowing at least one of her parents, whilst she only stood in awe of the other. Did she not constantly think of Elsie—of the society into which she was thrown—of how natural it was that the girl should take a fancy to some one among the many suitors who were already aspiring for the honour of her hand?—of how Mrs. Delmott could never be expected to take anything but a languid interest in the matter, and how terrible would be the danger of Elsie's choosing amiss?

"Who is it who wishes to be introduced to me?" she asked, in sudden alarm; "you never mean to say you will put up with that Midas with the ass's ears? Silly child! Why can't you be content to remain as you are? Why is it all the girls are so bent on getting married? Elsie, I thought better of you! What an enviable life yours will be, to be sure! Let me see—horses, carriages, a cruise in your own yacht, a continental trip, balls, theatres, *ad*

libitum, and a husband that dare not prevent you from doing as you please."

"You know that is all at an end long ago," said the offended beauty, almost in tears. "There is no one else in the world to speak to but you, and yet it is absurd for me to come to you. You always laugh at me; your ideas are so strange you almost make me shiver."

"Nonsense; you need not think I am in earnest, dear. Of course I am not so absurd as to expect to make other people happy always according to my own ideas. *Bonheur* as well as *noblesse oblige*, you remember. But I really did not know it was half so serious. Do you mean to say it is actually the old stale story, which comes a great deal too quickly in your case—if it is so?" asked Jocelyn, gravely, in a meditative tone. "Remember, papa is not so rich as he seems; and I don't know, after all, if it wouldn't be preferable for you to take the millionaire, though he *is* little better than an idiot. Half the women of the present day are trafficked for like creatures sold in the shambles, and a fair proportion of the other half

sacrifice themselves by taking the shadow for the substance. You are just one of the last sort, Elsie, and yet you will be constant—you will give away your heart when you *do* give it, once and for all, forgetting that it is a gift which can never be bestowed a second time—and give it, I daresay, to some one who is by no means worthy of it."

"I have given nothing away. How absurd you are!" said her sister, petulantly. "But I want *you* just for once to give me an opinion; not that you will do him justice, for he is too much like yourself—always questioning, denying, and teazing, a little irritating at times, but so different from other people."

"And you have met him at Dyneford?—wonder of wonders! I thought Dyneford only furnished polished men, whose characters had no more creases in them than their newest coats from the tailors'; men always ready with compliments, good dancers, good talkers. I am glad you have not chosen one of them for my brother-in-law."

"What brother-in-law would you like if you

had the power to choose?" asked Elsie, a little slily, trying to enter into her banter.

"Let me see," she said, in mock earnest—"I have dreamt of a man I have never yet met out of books; a man of inflexible will and undeniable superiority, yet courteous to everyone—chivalrous, self-denying; one of those ambitions toilers whose eyes, sunk with night-watches, have the glimmer of——"

"Don't be a goose," said Elsie, interrupting her, half inclined to cry. "You will do nothing but laugh at me, and I cannot make mamma listen. She always asks about the money, and thinks so much about a title. But I can only just say he is not a bookworm or a prig. And yet—well, Hugh can tell you all about him; his University career was such a brilliant one! Indeed, I *do* want some advice; and it is too bad of you not to give it me. Mamma never will go with me anywhere, and as for Hugh, he is always at College, whilst those *chaperons* are all alike—they want to waltz so much themselves. I never can find mine by any chance—they think so much about dancing. And everybody says

you wouldn't be so strange if you would just go out with me a little. Papa would be more ready to invite people here," pleaded the younger sister, earnestly; "you always make yourself out more odd than you really are. You don't mean to doubt the possibility of such a thing as love?"

"I would do away with half the cases of falling in love," protested Jocelyn, in her most didactic manner. "They are more than half of them unreal cases. It's worse for women to make fools of themselves, because their foolishness is apt to last. I don't mean to say that women are of necessity more sentimental or impressionable than men, but their hearts and minds are not sufficiently engaged in other ways. When girls have other objects worth living for, they won't be more apt than men to throw their whole energies into what is popularly called 'love.'"

She broke off with a start from this statement of her theory, which was verging on a soliloquy, at the sound of a suppressed sob from her sister, and turned to see Elsie's face quivering with suppressed excitement.

"Then you are really in earnest?" she whispered, in sudden penitence. "I am very sorry if I offended you."

"No—no—you—have not—offended me," was the answer, elicited in quivering fragments of disjointed speech. "But you have disappointed me so. I came to you for help, because I can't go to my mother. But you live in a world of your own, and starve yourself on books; and—and you have a way of speaking so unlike other people's."

"What did you wish me to do?" asked Jocelyn, in a faltering voice, her fit of penitence increasing.

And in another minute Elsie, bright as ever, was seizing her opportunity to enforce those new commands which were to alter the whole aspect of her sister's life.

CHAPTER II.

ON the following morning, all was quiet at Dyneford Park. Elsie had returned at a late hour from her ball, and the blinds were drawn down on that side of the house, which was adorned with pretty dimity curtains and modern plate-glass, and which had been specially allotted for her use. Mrs. Delmott—whose beauty of a few years before was daily becoming more and more a tradition of the past, but who was still tolerably comfortable, passibly healthy, in spite of her pretence of ill-health, and almost wholly indifferent to every human being—had her breakfast sent, as usual, to her bed-room; whilst Jocelyn and her father, who were "on very good terms," as the saying goes

—terms of mutual coldness, with an outer veneer of politeness, which imposed on strangers—had breakfast at an early hour together. As soon as the solemn *tête-à-tête* was ended, the girl waited impatiently till her father had settled himself with his newspaper, and then, seizing her garden-hat, gratified her longing to plunge into the outer world, and to bathe herself in its light and colour.

The night had been a stormy one, and a soft, soughing breeze still lingered among the branches of the trees, as a faint remembrance of the departed wind. A blending of sweet odours was wafted in that breeze. There was still a chirping and a twittering from the birds, whose concert had been recently concluded; whilst the wide expanse of far-stretching park lay indistinct in the dim haze of the morning. What lover of natural beauty could have resisted the influence of the hour? Not Jocelyn, as she bounded from the quiet entrance, with the big Newfoundland dog, with its noble, trusty face, by her side—a dog which had been chosen to be her protector in the soli-

tary walks of which Mrs. Delmott had hinted her mild disapproval.

Jocelyn, with her passionate nature, had a tendency to fits of melancholy, which seemed to be entirely beyond her control, and which, no doubt, dated from her birth. A life so intense and so lonely as hers had hitherto been, had necessarily produced a morbid effect on her mind, and, in spite of her continual affectation of strength, there was danger to her from the undue preponderance of unacknowledged sentiment, and from her dread of wounding the susceptibilities of the few whom she loved. But she could be joyous enough at times. She could talk like a sage, and yet be impulsive as a child; she could be sad with a sadness which was unnatural to her years, and yet brimming over with gaiety in other of her moods, as if two separate beings were merged into one. She had little or no religion, in the highest sense of the word, though she had been touched by the æsthetical part of Christianity, and had already made a careful collection of prints from the old Masters, chorals and fugues

from the best-known composers, and illuminated texts from various missals.

Hitherto her secret communing with nature had stood her in stead of a more practical creed, and never had she felt her soul thirst to let the beauty of the outer world sink deeply into her heart, moulding and transforming her by its quietistic influences, more strongly than at the present moment. She could not reason on it, for her nature was full of strange contradictions, for which she could not account even to herself. She only knew that from her earliest childhood there had been days like the present, when the ever-varying infinity of tree and sky would send a throb to her heart, and would paint her cheek with scarlet, just as a word of contradiction would make her pulses beat with angry defiance, or a strain of sweet music would bring the tears to her eyes.

Jocelyn was generally self-controlled, but the conversation of the previous evening, her anxiety about her brother, and the change which she had promised to make in her hitherto unchequered life, had shaken her spirit to its

depths. She had lost the reins of self-government, and allowed her vehement feelings to have full sway.

There is a popular belief that drowning men are able in one wild moment to recall the crowding phantoms of their past lives—all the pleasures and all the anguish, all the sin and all the strivings after goodness. Some such moments come to most of us in the course of our lives—come, perhaps, in merciful anticipation of the final opening of that great Book of Memory, when there can be no erasure of the handwriting against us. Such a crisis had come to Jocelyn Delmott. As she bared her face to the soft air, and let her hair wave over her heated forehead, the scenes of her past life seemed to rush again into her memory. She remembered the time when she had first heard the story of her mother's death, and had first learnt to pride herself on her solitary feelings. For years after that time she had nursed the remembrance of fancied wrongs, till her thoughts by day, as well as her dreams by night, had been filled with visions of her unknown mother. Often

she lay weeping in her bed in the darkness, imploring the spirit of her dead mother to appear to her in her loneliness.

"Speak but one word," she would say—"come and tell me that you know how I love you." And then she would listen in breathless awe for the answer which had never been vouchsafed to her. Her aversion to her father had increased at times almost to a passion of dislike, and yet she had within her a vast capacity for loving. Perhaps, as she said, if that father had taken her into his confidence, or had associated her with his graver studies, the aversion might have decreased. But he had decisively pooh-poohed the idea of his daughter being clever. He had laughed at her shy and studious fancies, while with a little inconsistency he had been somewhat afraid of her. So it happened that Jocelyn's "peculiar ways," and her morbid aversion to society, had been "given in to," as her obnoxious governesses deplored, and the result was a wild overgrowth of certain peculiarities which in many respects required careful pruning.

As the girl grew into womanhood, and as childhood, with its stint of love, and its perplexing, unsolved questions, was passing away, her habitual abhorrence of all shams and pretences had only increased. But the treasures of a new and unfathomable world were at the same time ready for her; her imagination and the mysteries of nature seemed to beckon to her, "Come and examine us." Jocelyn Delmott was, in fact, one of the many women who in the present state of civilization are possessed of a certain sort of genius, unconcentrated and undisciplined, in utter unconsciousness of its possession, and without knowing how to make the slightest use of it. Her cleverness had proved to be rather in her way than otherwise when she attempted to help her brother, whose unprincipled conduct was continually jarring upon her father's old-fashioned sense of honour and integrity. Till Hugo had been freed from the repressive influences of his home, he had seemed to be a comparatively harmless young man; and perhaps, if Mr. Delmott could have been contented with his son's riding well to

hounds, and with the well-filled bags of game which Hugo brought home on shooting-days, he might have continued harmless still.

But now there were times when his sister feared that his case was becoming desperate. For if, when he went to Oxford, the boy had been free from baser vices, he had shown an aptitude for acquiring them after but short apprenticeship. Passionate and pleasure-seeking, with an utter want of balance or of moral courage, and with an inexhaustible faculty for getting into scrapes, Hugo had quickly tired his father's patience, and as quickly emancipated himself from petticoat influence.

Jocelyn remembered all this as she looked up again at the light which was sparkling and palpitating between the leaves of the beech-trees which overgrew the deserted pathway she had loved from her childhood. And as she gazed absently at the distance where the billowy expanse of vegetation—grey, and yet luminous, delicate and retreating, with multitudinous variety of tint—was mingling without any definite line in the beautiful mystery of the

Summer sky, all nature seemed to be impenetrable, and so was her future life. Yet she felt as if she must break through the barriers which had hitherto hemmed her in, and get out towards the remote, unfathomable horizon. Her heart, though she knew it not, was rising up in wild tumult against the unnatural tyranny which her mind had hitherto imposed upon it, and was dashing itself like a bird against the bars of its prison, with a yearning desire to break through the routine of her monotonous life, and to know something of that outer world which had before seemed so blank and empty to her—something of those other hearts which she had treated with indifference.

"Hitherto I have been nobody," she said, scornfully, to herself. "I have not even helped Hugo. I have been of no use to a single creature, and if I were to die to-morrow nobody would miss me. Oh! it cannot be right to go on so!"

Full of fresh projects, she left the "wilderness," as it was familiarly called in the family, and wandered back slowly towards the house,

disregarding, to Neptune's astonishment, his most familiar endearments, and even deigning no notice when he tapped her somewhat roughly with his paw, as if to invite her to one of their usual rambles in the sun and breeze.

The mental conflict was over, and the girl's heart was full of new-born hopes. When she reached the more trimly-kept paths, she found herself warbling snatches of song-like bird-notes, and then stopped till the feathered creatures came fluttering near her, expecting to be fed with crumbs of biscuit, in obedience to the well-known call. For the pretty impudent robins, and the dainty finches, who could be tempted by friendly endearments, with the timid yellow-hammer, the pert wren, and the dusky warbler of the night, whose voice seemed to be given to it to make amends for its want of beauty, were all Jocelyn's favourites. Woe be to village boy who ventured to plunder in her favourite woods; for bird's nesting, in Jocelyn's creed, was an unpardonable crime. She mourned over a widowed thrush, or a slain sparrow, as she did over a trapped rabbit—all the animal world was beloved by her.

Elsie was already in the flower-garden adjoining the house, scissors in hand, clipping her favourite flowers. There seemed to be a resemblance between the girl in her slender fragility, and the white lilies with their golden centres, which stood up tall and straight by her side, with butterflies poising themselves on their buds. Tier above tier rose the bright-coloured blossoms—June roses predominating over the other flowers—and in the midst of the garden was a marble basin, with gold and silver fish, and a fountain which cooled the air in the warmest days of Summer.

"Surely the lines have 'fallen for us in pleasant places,' though I did not acknowledge it," thought Jocelyn, in her new content, as she stood to gaze upon this picture.

Elsie came running to her with a smile on her face.

"You remember your promise—Mrs. Robson's to-morrow night. Only one ordeal at present, as there will be no more parties this year. But I won't have you secluded any more."

"Is the somebody to be there? Oh!—oh! for

Somebody!" asked the elder sister, with a little spice of cynical mischief, which she instantly regretted, as the warm red colour flooded Elsie's face and neck.

"Mr. Fenwick told me to expect him, if that is what you mean," she said, with unwonted dignity, which became her well, and a look of reproach which was not wasted on Jocelyn.

"You must introduce me at once; you have told me he is clever, and I am going to ask what is unfairly called a woman's question, though, after all, women are never such fops as men. Is he ugly? Because, you know, I have a weakness for ugly men."

"He is nice to look at, though he *has* the misfortune of being a man, and not a woman, spelt with a capital W," answered Elsie, with a parting shaft which human nature could scarcely have resisted.

CHAPTER III.

ELSIE had been particularly anxious about her preparations for Mrs. Robson's ball, which was to be an unusual event, occurring at a time when the season had generally concluded in the neighbouring town of Dyneford. Dyneford was about half a century behind the age, famous for its scandal, its want of intellectual energy, its old-fashioned prejudices of caste, and the limited means of its inhabitants. Jocelyn, who, owing to her father's prejudices, had seen little beyond her immediate neighbourhood, and who had been present a few years before at one or two dinners, which bored her, and one county ball, which strengthened her aversion to such entertainments, was invari-

ably at her worst when she enlarged on the weaknesses of the Dyneford people—their fondness for keeping up show on a small expenditure, their sauntering walk, their affectation of languor, and their inveterate habit of staring, &c., &c. The Dyneford people were accustomed to have a good deal to amuse themselves, and already there were chirpings and twitterings amongst the ladies whenever the Miss Delmotts were mentioned. "Was it the pretty Miss Delmott, or the clever one?" they always asked, significantly; "the conceited girl who turned all the gentlemen's heads, because they could not see through her, or that dreadfully blue one, who stood up for 'Women's Rights?' For their part, they had no patience with either of them."

Elizabeth Delmott rather enjoyed this kind of criticism. It proved that other people were jealous of her, and she liked them to be jealous. She had no objection at all to knowing herself to be the cynosure of all eyes in the town which her sister so much disliked.

"What, after all, was the *good* of disliking it?"

Jocelyn asked herself, in the spirit of her new philosophy.

She had to "go out," and going out might as well be done, like anything else, in real earnest. She thought it hard if that taste which she had heard so much extolled could do nothing for its owner. It was with an eye for effect that she selected a wreath of simple laurel leaves, which she twined in the braids of her massive dark hair. She had chosen a white corded silk dress, the folds of which fell heavily round her figure. Formerly it would not have been a matter of the slightest consequence to her how the drapery was arranged, for she had prided herself on disdaining the appliances of modern dress, and refusing to lend herself to anything like feminine adornment. But now she looked at the effect with a critical eye, and was highly dissatisfied with the frothy appearance of certain white trimmings, with which the dressmaker had thought fit to adorn the square-cut body.

"If I don't look like other people, I must not dress in the same style," she explained, as she quietly took up the dress and proceeded to

cut away all the adornments in question—a judicial proceeding, which excited the cries and expostulations of her maid.

"I assure you it is nothing but trumpery," explained Jocelyn, loftily, as she mollified Curtis by handing over to her the treasures of bugle-lace, and other fripperies, which were then the height of the fashion, as a tribute to her tender feelings. For the first time in her life, when the clicking and snipping of the scissors had ended, she gave a searching glance at the glass, which reflected her noble face, with her fine bust and sloping shoulders unadorned, but for the folds of simple white.

"It's such a pity to go without crinoline, with such a figure as she has, too!" muttered Curtis, in a stage aside; then she said, in a louder voice,

"Miss Elsie told me to ask you, ma'am, which you would please to wear to-night—your gold and turquoise chain, or your diamond locket? If you could lend her the blue ornaments, and wear the locket——"

"Take them all to her to choose from—I

don't mean to wear any ornaments. As to the diamonds, they might all go to the glaziers for what I care," answered Jocelyn, with what her enemies would have called an "affectation of superiority," as she swept majestically from the room.

Excitement had certainly altered her appearance. The colour burned on her olive cheeks, and she congratulated herself on the fact that Hugo was not at home to rally her in his usual style.

"Positively classical!—copying Sappho, eh? Not altogether a bad dodge; though you'll cut a monstrous queer figure in a ball-room! *Won't* the women pick holes in you for being different from themselves; *don't* they know how to pick holes in another woman who happens to be fit to look at, &c., &c." She could imagine it for herself, without the pleasure of hearing it.

Presently came Elsie, making the air redolent with odours of patchouli, and dressed in some aërial costume of that pale bluish-green tint which is sometimes seen in Summer skies; and white jessamine in her hair. Mr. Delmott

looked up through his spectacles, and glanced approvingly at his younger daughter. But when he caught sight of Jocelyn, he started, as if struck by some sudden recollection.

"Are you well?" he asked, noticing the hectic spots on her cheeks.

She scarcely knew whether she was or not. She afterwards felt as if she must have been beside herself on that special evening. How else was she to account for the sudden disappearance of all those quietistic influences with which she had hitherto sought to surround herself? The glamour of life seemed to be opening before her.

Once at Mrs. Robson's ball, she threw herself into the pursuit of pleasure with a sense of eager excitement which was new to her. Most of the county magnates were already there, and the dance-music was streaming in from an adjacent room where the wind instruments were concealed, when the sisters arrived, accompanied by a convenient duenna. Young men stood about dangling their engagement cards, and groups of expectant ladies were

collected here and there. But Jocelyn was not content, as she had been on previous occasions, with sitting apart, endeavouring to work out some possible theory of her own from the study of human life around her. On the contrary, she laid herself out to amuse, and found that she was not, as before, unnoticed. There were many to ask her to dance, and to pay her compliments, but in her heart she scorned them for being deceived by trifles. "They are all alike —they only care for appearances," she thought, conscious of the unusual pains which she had taken with her toilet, the crimson flush on her cheek, and the unwonted lustre in her eyes. "They do not care for the stone, but only for the setting. I will give them what they want."

When she tried she could talk well. It is a rare faculty, and one which is growing rarer every day; but on this occasion she rattled on thoughtlessly and gaily. She had hitherto condemned those who trifled with the feelings of others as children playing with fire, or only tolerated savages. But she now found that in flirting, as in gambling, there is a spirit

of competition which bears one on, a determination to show one's power. Her subtle excuse was, "It is vanity to attempt to raise myself above others—I tried to do so, and I made a deplorable failure. I cannot be Cæsar to myself. At Rome we must do as Rome does."

"You waltz well, but I can see you are not really fond of it," said the partner with whom she had danced more than once, but whose name she had not heard at the moment of introduction. He was of middle stature, supple, and well-built, and dark, like herself, but with strongly-marked features, large forehead, and perpendicular folds between the eyebrows.

"It is amusing to stand still for a change, and watch like a child at a pantomime," she answered, as the dancers passed her so closely that she was half swathed, now in a tunic of blue silk, and now in a cloud of white tulle.

"Marvellous gymnastics, are they not? especially for the middle-aged, almost as marvellous as the gyrations of a lot of mayflies in the sunshine?" he said in a half earnest, half sarcastic manner. "Not that I at all wonder that *you* have

a natural aversion to waltzing. Tall, grand-looking ladies should condescend to nothing less important than the 'Minuet de la Cour.'"

"And men with faces sallowed with the 'pale cast of thought,' and with just that dash of melancholy about them which is said to be interesting, should condescend to nothing less important than burning the midnight oil," she answered with an easy rippling laugh.

"Ah! that *tu quoque* is very fair. I daresay you thought it a very good answer to my chaff. I don't wonder you weary of the fine-spun wire-woven phrases so usual on these occasions, and I beg your pardon if you thought I meant to annoy you with one," he answered, not at all taken aback, but with an ease and frankness which pleased her by its absence of affectation; "that is, of course *some* women like flattery; I refer to those who *think*. Theologically speaking, I suppose all the girls who are present here to-night are to be credited with the possession of minds and souls, but practically it seems as if there must be some great mistake."

"Are you a Mahometan?" she answered, echoing his laugh. "*I* am beginning to be glad that everybody is not clever. Cleverness is said to be always eccentricity."

"Always with commonplace people," he said with a shrug; and then added in a short, abrupt manner, "*You* have the reputation, true or not, of being very learned?"

She was conscious of the mischievous twinkle in his eye, and retorted quickly,

"Please don't; do you wish to make me feel as if I had a 'ticket of leave?' Everyone who sets up for the reputation of a 'blue' must consent to enter society under penal conditions. I should find it dreadfully awkward to maintain the character."

"I will think that over; it is too deep for me," he continued with a smile. "I have heard that you possess the gift of puzzling everybody."

It was evident to her that he was terribly cynical, and also that the introduction had not been wasted on one side; and though she could not guess that this stranger was

making the most of his opportunity in studying a "species feminæ" hitherto unknown to him, she was vexed at the consciousness that her own easy repartee had placed her already at a disadvantage. It was too late to be offended at the familiarity of his manner.

"I assure you I possess no gifts whatever, and that I don't make the *slightest* pretence to be learned," she continued in a more natural tone, and in her most energetic manner. "A scene like the present makes me feel that I am only half-educated; I am not a quarter so much at my ease with other people as many a girl who has just left school, and yet—I am past twenty," she added, stringing up her years in haste, as if she were rather glad to have got through them.

"And as for *me*, it makes me feel that I am immeasurably behind my generation, and that all book-learning is awfully inferior to a little familiarity with the world; and yet—yet—I am nearly thirty—" he continued in a tone of despair, which almost exactly imitated hers.

He gained his point, for she laughed again, and began to feel as if they were friends. He

too had lived, as he had said, out of the world and with his books, and *his* mind, as she began to think, must be too energetic to be tolerant of conventionalities.

They had fallen out of the circle of the dancers, and stood for a little time gazing at the scene.

"Seriously," he said, "I am glad we have tempted you from your solitude. The habit of retirement insensibly grows on one. Not that it is a common habit. Most of us prefer to keep reflection at arm's length by hunting pleasure in crowds."

She did not answer, and he continued:

"Who is it who calls modern society the hot-bed for the 'approbativeness of women'? Plenty of small coin in the way of the flattery you so much dislike interchanged to-night, I will undertake to say. But, with all due deference to *you*, I think those hearts must be very weak ones which are perverted by a little natural praise. We have no reason to be ashamed of our show of beauty (it is a good one, is it not?) for a country town. Always

allowing for the disfigurement which is supposed to be necessary by hairdressers, dressmakers, and people of that sort."

Jocelyn assented, and was eagerly pointing out a young girl whose simplicity seemed to be her principal attraction.

"Humph!" said he. "Got up from first to last; every position studied. Miss Delmott, you are evidently very unsophisticated."

If, as was possible, he had wished to raise the latent combativeness of her disposition, he succeeded again. She took fire at once.

"Cannot you believe," she asked, "that women can admire each other, and enthusiastically too? I think there is nothing so mean as scandal, and I do not know why you choose to confide in me, if you must make disparaging remarks."

"Disparaging!" he exclaimed, with an air of mild astonishment. "Why, putting scandal on one side, taking it for granted that the golden locks are genuine, and the roses and lilies nature's purest colouring, I never could admire

that style of woman; it is of too purely a Saxon type to suit my taste. I don't know how it is, but I never could get into raptures over fair women."

"Was not Elsie fair?" thought Jocelyn, as she put a little extra ice into her answer. The waltz had ended by this time, and she was wondering what had become of Mrs. Norton.

"*My* knowledge does not go deep enough to permit of my discussing the question. I think, if you please, I will leave *that* sort of learning to you. But, after all, I suppose you are only joking. I have always heard that jocosity is the proper thing in a ball-room; and that is one reason why I have always hated balls. Why, if nothing is to be mentioned which does not verge upon banter, and if all subjects are to be dropped directly they become serious, I shall soon begin to feel like a fish out of water. I am afraid I am like a Scotchman—deficient in humour. It is so tiresome to hear everything wrested out of its natural connection."

"I often get dismally bored with it myself," he answered, still with the half-comical tone in

his voice which she resented as an insult to her sex, as he escorted her to the conservatory, which was supplied with velvet seats and coloured lamps, and which communicated with the drawing-room. "And so you do not like Ethnology? Well, we will talk of something else. Before I met you to-night, I was weary of whispering polite nothings to simpering people. I am like the blundering donkey imitating the lapdog when I attempt pretty sayings; and I make a dreadful hash of compliments. So by all means let us talk of something sensible; in *your* company it ought to be an *embarras des richesses*. Let me see, shall we launch into philosophy, and unsphere the spirit of Plato? or shall we let our conversation rise to the affecting, the ideal virtues, the tender love of near relations——"

"Stop!" said Jocelyn, angrily. She thought herself insulted by his unconscious allusion to what she considered to be the miseries of her home-life, and rushed at once into the very heart of the battle. "Such things exist, and are too noble to be lightly spoken of.

I am only too apt, as it is, to suspect the underside of many a tolerable picture. But when I *can* dream, let me dream; I hope I shall never learn to sneer. I hope to live many years yet before I fancy there is nothing but ashes beneath whited stones, and take it into my head that there is no such thing as beauty and goodness in this world of ours."

He suddenly roused into self-defence.

"You mistake me," he said. "It was the fashion of the great Lords of ancient times to let their jesters enter at all their merry-makings. A good fashion, I think, for do you not see how jest is often the truest earnestness? Champagne does not sparkle for ever, I admit, and for me as well as for you there is deep tragedy beneath this comedy. But we must live, *il faut s'amuser.*"

With the commencement of this speech she was ready to sympathise, but the tone of cynicism chilled her again, and she turned away.

"You do not speak," he said; "you are condemning me in your heart. I am a hopeless bungler when I try to explain. Tell me the truth, you have heard me called a miserably

unsettled man, a wretched misanthrope, an atheist—have you not?"

Jocelyn looked up, intending to tell him that she had not even heard his name, but there was a change in his face which stopped her. There had been something indefinable in the expression of it before, which seemed to give her a warning against him, but now the fire in his eyes reminded her only too vividly of her own excitable nature. She began to be interested.

"Ah! you have not heard," he continued as quickly. "And after all, you are not one to attach much importance to the hollow-minded verdict of a certain class of people in Dyneford. And if I happen to have no great reverence for what is ancient, very likely I do not differ in that respect from yourself. The yoke of old scholasticism can no longer be accused of fettering the thoughts of our age. But as to the gossips here, fathering all sorts of rubbishing opinions upon me, why, I venture to think that the rising flood of new opinions is no better than the old; they are most of them twaddling, and all more or less absurd. It will never be

my way to build up a great superstructure of theory on needle-points of argument, the existence of which may turn out after all to be assumed."

She was still more puzzled, but waited for him to continue.

"What," he asked, "has not your sister mentioned my delinquencies? Though you look as if you could see right through a stone wall, and could dispense with an introduction, which might be necessary to other people, yet under the circumstances I suppose I must introduce myself. Well, then—Behold a fellow who has never done anything worth mentioning, and is never likely to do anything but make mischief in the world; who is not on the best of terms with his relations, or himself, but is cursed with a little property, which excuses him in idleness, and wastes his time in ventilating all sorts of queer ideas through the Radical press. A fellow to whom existence is a riddle, and not a particularly pleasant one; and who sometimes wishes that his schoolmaster had administered to him as thorough a flogging as Coleridge received when

he was a juvenile prig, and began first to give himself airs about the uncertainty of things."

She still answered nothing, but the velvety-brown eyes rich in shadow like those of a Murillo, and the face with its strongly intellectual stamp, seemed to lure him on to further confidences. His story seemed to her to be only a succession of enigmas, though she learned afterwards to know that it was not uncommon. He told how a spirit of narrow Pharisaism, and of hopeless selfishness, may be masked under the apology of religion; how a home may be robbed of all the light of happiness, and terror introduced, instead of love, under the mistaken idea of duty. And as he enlarged on the miseries of a dismal childhood, the tedious hours of long dreary Sundays, the dull routine of everyday life, and of a reaction which was as natural as it was violent, her thoughts went back to her own early history.

"And now I may parody the complaint of the 'Miller of the Dee,'" he added. "I agree with no one, and no one agrees with me. What would be the use of my comforting myself with fallacies? And yet in the presence of any one

as real and intense as yourself I feel like a miserable trifler—a sort of half shadow of being."

His words jarred upon her unpleasantly, and still she knew not what to answer. Her conscience told her that he overvalued her earnestness, for at that moment the nothingness of all created things flashed upon her as a stern, inevitable fact, and she knew how utterly devoid she was of any real foundation on which to rest. They had hidden themselves from the dancers, Jocelyn excusing herself on the score of fatigue, and were sitting by a window which some philanthropist had opened, to spare the roses on the ladies' cheeks, and to save Mrs. Robson's drawing-room from becoming as poisonous as another Black Hole. And while Jocelyn was seeking for words, she drew the curtain back, and both looked out. Below the garden at the back of the house were some of the commoner outskirts of Dyneford; but the inhabitants of these suburbs were now hushed in sleep. Lamplights were dimly to be seen, and, above, the moon was reflected in the dark clouds like a magic glass of light, whilst

the stars were shining brightly, and their language seemed to furnish the answer which was needed. In her ignorance, the girl felt as if there were a witness in that living hymn, "written in light."

"Look," she said, "at the lamps of men's lighting below, and, above, the lamps of God's great city. Let us listen to the voice of the oldest preacher—Night. Does it not tell us that God is with us—He who made all the suns?"

She had lowered her voice, and felt the crimson colour flooding her face. She knew that she was launching into untrodden regions, and dared attempt nothing but the vaguest generalities. And she wished she had not attempted them at all when she saw the old look of sarcasm return to her listener's face.

"I cannot say that I am so much affected as most people are by mere size," he answered. "I think the animalculæ in a drop of water quite as wonderful as the stars."

"Do you remember the fable of the blind Orion?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, with the same slight smile,—

"that he goes incessantly towards the sun because he will find his sight. And so I suppose you want to apply the moral to me?"

"It seems to me, indeed, to apply a little. How often the seekers after truth *fancy* they turn their eyes to the sky; but they look in the wrong direction, for the star is still shining in the East, as for the Magi of old. I remember a quaint German writer saying, 'Let us not be only as the flowers, which open their leaves to the sun; but as the sun-flower, which turns towards it.'"

He did not answer with one of his usual jokes, but kept his face averted.

"Perhaps," she thought, "he does not think my words worthy of serious discussion; or perhaps he hides a laugh at my expense."

She moved to go. Just then the air blew in cool and fresh. It was pleasant to her heated head, which was aching and confused in a manner for which she could scarcely account, as she lingered to breathe it.

"How can you enjoy it?" he asked. "I wonder how Mrs. Robson can endure this situa-

tion. It is a fine old house; but the garden is small, and the surroundings are abominable. Just now the air is blowing from that quarter of the town where the people herd together like pigs; and the rich, who call themselves Christians, are content to have it so. An outbreak of fever, or of cholera, would be the only thing to bring us to our senses. Pah! How often, in the midst of our gaieties, we might cry out, as the woman in the plague did,—'Death! death!' In London they carry it a little further than we do; and those who complain, in the London season, of the hot atmosphere of ball-rooms, should remember that, within a stone's throw of their magnificent dwellings, the dead and the living may be huddled together in dark, miserable dens. They ought to have a mortuary to every overcrowded house."

She looked at him in astonishment. The expression of his face had completely altered in a few moments, and she wondered she had not noticed before how ill and worn he looked. She laughed uneasily.

"How can you be so morbid? You seem to be as great a coward about death as Dr Johnson. It is *I* who shall have to turn philosopher now, and remind you that death is no evil because it is universal."

"Ah!" he answered, in his former light manner, "what were life if life were all?—especially for the poor creatures of whom I was speaking, and who are not nearly so well off as the savages. By-the-by, if you are going to begin to quote, you need not stop at Schiller and Johnson; I can supply you with plenty of sentiment on the subject from a commonplace-book which I used to keep when I was a juvenile dreamer, but I have long ceased to get any comfort from fine sayings."

* * * * * * *

Meanwhile the music swept on unheard. Backwards and forwards, swiftly and smoothly, swimming over the glassy floor went the nimble feet of the waltzers; and through a low, curtained doorway, which communicated from the ball-room to the small ante-chamber leading to the conservatory in which Jocelyn and her

new friend had taken refuge, past the whirling crowd of dancers, came the pretty sister of whom Jocelyn had always been accustomed to say that she did "all the ornamental in the family," with her draperies of the colour of Summer skies, with floating golden hair, dishevelled by the dance; with mobile lip, and sparkling fascination of eye. Elsie had seldom looked more lovely.

"Fancy, after all your protestations, Mr. Fenwick," she said, pirouetting still as she left her partner where the curtain fell,—"fancy your not appearing all this time, and when I had actually reserved your dance for you."

The voice startled him, as the name startled Jocelyn. He shook himself as if from a dream, recognising what an interval seemed to have grown between himself and the recognised belle of Dyneford in the last short hour. The brilliant scene which had been revealed by the uplifted curtain, the strains of music, and the love in Elsie Delmott's eyes, all seemed to him like a hideous dream. Fragile, illogical, childish, bewitching, as she had always appeared to

him before, how could he account for it that she had suddenly lost her charm? Hers at least was not one of the feminine natures which had been dragged through the mire of a worldly life, and about which, at times, he could be so bitterly sarcastic.. The poor child seemed scarcely worldly enough as she stood looking down with occasional blushes as she spoke to him. Jocelyn admitted to herself that Elsie was trebly charming when she could be perfectly natural and confiding, as she was at present.

"This is *our* waltz," she persevered, with a triumphant reminder; "and though it is very good of Jocelyn to have been amusing you so long, I must tell you that *her* name has been inquired for several times in the next room. Self-sacrificing as she may be, it won't do for her to engage herself, and then desert her partners for the sake of pleasing me."

Lyle Fenwick looked bewildered for a moment as he gazed at the glittering tresses of the one sister, and the dark hair of the other—blue-black, he thought, like that of the goddess Artemis. The eyes of the beauty, as he had often

told her, were "blue as the Ægean Sea"; but of the other eyes, he never knew whether they were brown or black; he would never have dared to liken them to anything foolishly sentimental. Perhaps they changed colour, but they were not ox-eyes, or gazelle-eyes, he decided as he looked at them, or like any other animal's eyes; but that of the masterpiece of creation—eyes that were the very portals of the soul. He could not make up his mind whether Jocelyn was handsome, for the very fact that he never got further than her eyes. The contrast was certainly startling enough to those who saw the two sisters together for the first time, but it scarcely accounted for the tone in which Mr. Fenwick answered,

"Oh, a waltz! Why, you know I am no partner. Why do you trouble yourself to dance another waltz, when you have danced so much already."

"Because I like it, which is the reason for half the things we do in the world," answered Elsie, the radiant brightness clouding on her face.

"And why should she not like it?" interposed

Jocelyn sharply. "I don't want her to be like the majority of young people, who, as soon as they have cut their milk teeth, think they are destined to reform the world."

Mr. Fenwick laughed uncomfortably, but Elsie blushed, and was so evidently annoyed, that the tears came into her eyes, and she endeavoured to hide them by affecting a wish to go out on the balcony.

"The night is cold," said Mr. Fenwick, following her, "and I have just been abusing this air; your sister thinks it is a fancy of mine."

She did not answer.

"You had better go in," he said gently.

She shook her head.

"Let me go and find your cloak."

"Never mind—it is of no consequence," she answered, in a voice so unlike her own, that his reflections began to make him uncomfortable.

"You are unhappy," he said, seizing her hand as if by an irresistible impulse. "I hope nothing can have happened to vex you."

No answer again, but something like a tear sparkled brightly on the pretty eyelashes in

the moonlight. Who could have avoided giving the little hand the least imaginable pressure under such circumstances? Not Lyle Fenwick certainly. It was the work of a moment to rush into the drawing-room, seize the first cloak which came to hand, and begin one of those whispered conversations by the light of the moon, which may probably be attributed to the occult influences of that planet.

* * * * * * *

Slowly the morning dawned. The gay flower-wreaths which hung in festoons from the walls were beginning to wither Mrs. Norton, who had long been nodding in a corner, awoke to go in search of her charges, and remind them of the lateness of the hour. The cold grey light of day crept into the rooms, making everything look weird and unnatural. The lamps were waning and flickering. Faces which had been beautiful seemed to lose their bloom, and altogether a sense of dissipation and incongruity took possession of Jocelyn's heart. Elsie pleaded for one more dance, but her sister hurried her away.

Heavy rain had come on as the morning came, the sort of jubilant Summer rain which refreshes the parched earth early on a fine day.

The merry drops were pattering down as the Delmotts stepped into their carriage from the cocoa-nut matting which was unrolled to protect their feet from the wet ground. But Jocelyn turned away with a sick feeling from the light, and answered her *chaperon* sharply, when she joked her about her partners.

She lost her patience when her maid was helping her to undress.

"Cut the lace," she said; "don't wait to undo it; I am dead tired, I want to be alone."

When she took off the wreath of laurel leaves, she tossed it on the bed in utter disgust; it looked to her absurd and incongruous by daylight. Afterwards it was impossible to sleep, though she strove to quiet her restlessness by creeping into her sister's room, and listening to Elsie's quiet breathing. The incense of roses was filling the air. Whole branches of a tree which clambered outside were peeping in at the casement of the window, which had been

left ajar. Outside was a stir of birds fluttering from branch to branch of the acacia, Jocelyn's favourite tree, which grew on this side of the house. She listened to the joyous twitter of life, the chirps of delight which were sent from downy breasts, as the concert grew into the perfection of vocalized sound.

She wondered why she was so foolishly sad, for she did not believe in presentiments of coming sorrow. Why should she feel as if some iconoclast had been at work in her heart, carrying on a wild sport of moral image-breaking?

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER a short sleep, Jocelyn woke late in the morning, with the restlessness of the previous evening still unabated, to listen more impatiently than usual to her sister's prattle. For Elsie, in a white cambric wrapper adorned with the blue satin bows which were becoming to her complexion, made her appearance at the breakfast-table before ten o'clock, and was ready to comment on the success of the previous night.

"I don't think my dress ever set so well," she boasted. "I had about six stiff petticoats on, and they gave all the fulness of crinoline without its stiffness. Didn't you notice how soft and billowy it looked? And I must really keep to that style of hair. I remember it was

your taste which made me pile it up so. Lyle Fenwick said I looked like a Sir Joshua Reynolds. He is not a 'dancing man,' you know; and I thought him not like himself first of all last night. But he was in a very complimentary mood afterwards, on the balcony."

"His compliments are rather acidulated drops, I should think," answers her sister, coldly. "He can sneer a little when he laughs, and his is something like Malvolio's 'austere smile of regard.'"

"Ah! that is because you don't know him," said Elsie, good-temperedly. "Yet I am sure you must have liked him, or you wouldn't have talked to him quite so much. By-the-by, what a fright that Miss Harrison looked!—and yet she has really good features. But think of pink silk and black lace for a blonde! And then the hideous shape of her chignon! You can't give the *fin bec*, I believe, if a person hasn't got it. And, after all, I am as stupid about some things as she is. I shall be nothing to look at when I am married, I am sure, if I haven't got *you* to consult about my dress."

"You are taking Time by the forelock," said Jocelyn, still coldly.

She could not bear Elsie's talk any longer. She felt as if the commonplace atmosphere of the house oppressed her, and longed to escape into the garden, to breathe purer air.

"Mr. Fenwick is coming this morning," said Elsie, throwing herself languidly on the sofa when the breakfast was concluded, and averting her face, so as to avoid her sister's scrutiny as she made the announcement. "I thought I might give him leave to come now the ice has been broken by his introduction to you. Last night he seemed so anxious I could not deny him."

"Then you will not want *me*—you will have your mother," answered Jocelyn, hastily. "I shall go out and sketch; I must brush off the cobwebs of my unusual dissipation."

"You are very anxious to be gone," answered Elsie, with a laugh.

But she did not attempt to dissuade her sister from her purpose, and only remonstrated about the clumsiness of Jocelyn's thick boots,

which had lately been manufactured by a country bootmaker.

"They are atrocious things!" she said,—"perfectly disfiguring to the foot. You must really get some others, if it is only to please me; I can't bear to see you in them."

"I have two or three other pairs already, and I am not a centipede," answered Jocelyn, with a lame attempt at joking, as she left the house with a step less brisk and elastic than usual.

But as soon as she was out of doors her spirits revived. Un-English as she might be in some of her ways, and taking, as the servants said, after her mother's "foreigneering" appearance, she had, at any rate, that strong admiration for landscape scenery which is said to be one of the dominant passions of the Saxon race.

There were a few light-winged clouds about just as she stepped into the garden, and a breeze had risen, making her feel as if there were new oxygen in the air. Whilst in a few minutes the sun burst through the clouds in its glory, illuminating the distant view with its prismatic rays of colour—reddish, greenish,

bluish, purplish, pinkish. Wherever there was form, there went colour, twinkling and dying away into the mystery of the distance, or concentrated into some intense spot, where its full power was revealed. Jocelyn lingered for a few minutes to gaze at the Gloire de Dijon roses, the unfolding buds of lilac, clematis, and her favourite bronze and yellow pansies. Dainty white and azure-winged butterflies had ventured from their hiding-places, and were making, with velvet-coated bees, for the centres of the golden-dusted lilies; whilst beyond was the tempting glimmer of the water, and a glimpse of the older part of the house, adorned with lichen and ivy.

But not here was to be the subject of Jocelyn's sketch. She wandered on into the wilderness beyond the fir-trees and the cedars, where she had so often loved to hide herself in her childish days; where the grass was thick and dewy, intermingled with soft mosses; where the woodruffe had but lately been studding the carpet, and where the moneywort was beginning to show its yellow stars.

Her fingers shook with eager excitement, so

anxious was she to commence her drawing. But it was a morning to baffle the most skilful adept in the art of painting—a morning in which light and shade were so harmoniously blended that it seemed impossible to determine the exact hue of anything—the local colour of the foreground taking greys and yellows and blues in a confusion of tint which was perfectly bewildering.

She had been about an hour at work, and was already inclined to throw away her brush in despair, when she was roused by the sound of voices behind her.

"Ah! there she is; I told you we should find her by following the prints of the crushed footsteps in the dampness of this grass."

"I should never have thought of such a thing. When all trades fail, Mr. Fenwick, you will do for a detective."

Elsie's laugh echoed gaily, and in another moment the intruders were peeping over the young artist's shoulder.

Jocelyn's first impulse was to resent the interruption, and, covering her painting with

her hand, she commenced sketching heads and noses on an open sheet of paper which overlaid the sketch.

"Let me look at it. I dabble a little in the art myself; I know what it is to have to bear perpetual failures," Lyle Fenwick said, as their eyes met, and the flashes of sunshine fell upon Jocelyn from between the rustling leaves.

In a moment she read the appealing expression of his face, and he was conscious of the reproof conveyed in hers. But, proud and susceptible as he was, and desirous of avoiding the least unfavourable conjecture about his conduct, his greater self-command enabled him to right himself. He stretched out his hand for the sketch as Jocelyn uncovered her work ungraciously. The freedom of his action was a little extraordinary, but he was not afraid of startling her, she was so entirely different from all the other women he had seen. And yet his instinct made him understand that a woman of her stamp would prefer an honest criticism to any amount of flattery.

"Can you guess how it is that amateurs

generally fail?" he asked, after he had examined the sketch in silence.

"From being badly taught, from idleness, or from anything you like; it does not much matter," answered Jocelyn carelessly, as she prepared to gather up her materials.

"No—from timidity. They are too conventional—afraid of interpreting Nature as she is. Why did you wash in your distance like that?"

"I thought it was a general rule to make the distance grey."

"There you are caught," said he, laughing. "Forget all about those hampering rules. What do you *see?* Every colour ranging from purple and yellow. By-the-by, I need not tell *you* to look through your own heart at the beauties of the outward world. The objects around are to be interpreted by the emotions of the beholder. I daresay you have remarked the wonderful connection between Tennyson's portrait and landscape painting. Precisely the same connection," he added, smiling, "as there is in somebody else's poems."

The colour flew to her brow, and she turned sharply to Elsie.

"Please, when you find my papers about, don't show them to other people."

"Why should you mind my showing the poems when, just this moment, you were letting him look at the sketch?" asked Elsie, in bewilderment. "And, for my part, I think the sketch promises to be exceedingly pretty. It is just like the place itself; and you know I always said the place reminded me of a Birkett Foster."

"Whew!—the idea of comparing nature to a man," remarked Fenwick with a shrug; and the beauty had the very unusual sensation of feeling herself snubbed. The more so as Jocelyn was sufficiently inconsiderate to add,

"That is why I hate the term 'picturesque'—it sounds as if we put our oil and water colour daubs before the masterpieces of creation."

"And some of our daubs with words; I do not say *yours*," he added slyly. "But you generally find the very people who go into stereotyped raptures over stars and skies,

Spring and Autumn, are humbugging lie-abeds, or city mollicoddles. I hate a mere trick of words! Why, even the attempt to put our not over-deep thoughts into the best-sounding language is a decided mistake! It's like selling out all our stock, and leaving ourselves nothing for emergencies."

He was busy with Jocelyn's sketch, dashing in the effect with a firm hand, and correcting the purple tones with orange and warm green—so that he could not see the rising colour on her cheek. Some egotistic feeling mingled not unnaturally with her indignation at his sweeping strictures, but she was a little mollified when he coolly proceeded—

"That is why *I* have given up writing; I have long been convinced that in my case, at least, 'silence is golden!' I believe it was my extraordinary devotion to work, when I was a small boy, which must have dwarfed my intellect in after-life. I used to fag eight hours a day, and leave myself only an hour for exercise. More fool I. I was a miner, working in darkness, and blinding myself to a world of wonders."

"I think it is a sad pity you have given up writing. Everybody says you ought to be famous!" chimed in Elsie, who was tired of standing unnoticed.

Her remark evidently jarred upon him, for he looked up for a moment from Jocelyn's painting, and said, kicking one of the stones that lay at his feet,

"I don't pretend to understand those longings after fame. True manliness neither aims at nor values notoriety."

"But you might write clever books," continued Elsie perseveringly.

"Have we not books enough to nauseate us in the present day? Books that are awfully in earnest—books which have nothing to do with their subjects—books which drive thoughts into your head, as Jael did the nails with her hammer—books that require the digestion of an ostrich—amd books that meander on in platitudes. Don't humiliate me by tempting me to add to their number."

Meanwhile Jocelyn's sketch was growing under his hand, and the crude sunlessness which

had disgusted her was melting into light.

"You never told me you could paint," said Elsie, in a half offended tone. "I begin to think you must be half-a-dozen people rolled into one."

"Or perhaps no person at all," he answered in his usual bantering tone; "I believe one of the great philosophers, in the books you are so anxious I should imitate, spoke of the whole world of matter as a mere apocalypse of thought. So that I, for aught you know to the contrary, may be a ghost, and you—my apparent listeners—pleasant phantoms in it."

He spoke to Jocelyn, but he glanced admiringly at Elizabeth. She had taken off her hat, and had tied a handkerchief of filmy lace coquettishly over her hair. And, tired of waiting for the improvements in Jocelyn's sketch, she had spread her sister's waterproof cloak carefully on the trunk of a fir-tree, and was seated on it in one of her most picturesque attitudes; whilst the sunlight, flickering between the branches of the trees, played lovingly on the little wavy line of hair left uncovered by the

Honiton lace, and illumined it with ruddy gold.

"Dear me! what an uncomfortable suggestion!"

"That I may be a ghost," he answered in the same tone. "Not at all—it is quite within the bounds of possibility. Consult Washington Irving, Le Fanu, or other authorities on this subject. They will tell you that many ghost stories rest on very good evidence. And why should the possibility of such an apparition appearing to yourself be treated with incredulity?"

"There are many deceptive appearances in the world, Elsie; take warning in time," added Jocelyn significantly, as she gathered up her painting materials, with scant thanks to her new acquaintance for having helped her out of a difficulty.

There was an awkward pause, during which she relented.

"I can run down my own performances, but I am ill-tempered after all," she thought, "when other people slight my ambitions."

And the pause continued so long that Elsie's face became red all over, thanks to the trans-

parency of skin which revealed every transient emotion.

"Give me those strips of grey sky," said Mr. Fenwick quietly at last. He had taken no notice of the stress which Jocelyn had laid upon her words, but had hastened to help her to collect her brushes, and was now bent upon saving some abortive attempts on wasted pieces of paper which she had intended to destroy. "The colour is skilfully and equally put on," he persisted, "and there ought to be no such thing as waste to those who, like yourself, love the economy of nature."

* * * * * * *

"You need not be quite so rude, Joyce, if you *don't* like him," whispered the younger sister, as they rose to set out for a further ramble into the woods.

For only answer Jocelyn left her to look on with envy as she vaulted lightly over a stile, which Elsie afterwards climbed gingerly, step by step. But the remonstrance seemed to have had its effect; for, in the walk which followed, conversation never flagged, and the

beauty looked from one to the other of her companions in evident astonishment at the points of interest they seemed to find in common.

CHAPTER V.

AS weeks passed on, Jocelyn found it impossible to avoid meeting Mr. Fenwick, who, after the party at Mrs: Robson's, availed himself of the slightest excuse for coming to Dyneford. It was a little annoying to her to discover that, on these occasions, she was expected to act the unnatural part of duenna to her younger sister. But all her life Mrs. Delmott had been accustomed to have her troublesome duties performed for her by other people, and she had no idea of altering her programme for her pretty daughter's convenience. She left Elsie to manage as she pleased with her love affairs, and would, indeed, have shifted her own little annoyances on the girl's childish shoulders

with perfect equanimity, had not the elder sister, rousing herself to meet the emergency, readily undertaken responsible duties which were unfitted for her years. It was in vain for Jocelyn to hint to her step-mother during these weeks that something more serious than usual was pending—something which intimately concerned her daughter's happiness. Mrs. Delmott went just as passively and languidly through that invalid routine, to which her husband, years ago, had reconciled himself with a passive contempt of which his wife was utterly and comfortably unconscious. No one seemed to be the least aware the while that a burden, too heavy for her to bear, was being placed all at once on the elder sister's shoulders. Jocelyn never complained; it was not her habit; and she could not have stated clearly her reasons for anxiety.

Her lonely wanderings in the park were her best safeguards at this crisis. But, on the other hand, as Hugh had returned home for the vacation, he and Elsie had become imperative in their demands for amusement, and there was

no avoiding the pic-nics and water-parties which were constantly planned for their recreation, and in which the elder sister was expected to take part.

Jocelyn entered into these amusements with exemplary patience, ever and anon considering how she could put in a word of cautious prudence.

"He has solid powers of mind, but he is wonderfully self-willed," she said, in answer to Elsie's praise of Lyle Fenwick's intellect. "He prides himself on receiving nothing from authority. That is a false pride, Elsie; I am sometimes afraid for you."

"He is like all clever men," answered the younger sister, defiantly. "I remember you used to say you liked people to be original."

"Yes; but he is so easily captivated by ideas which strike his fancy. He thinks himself a close reasoner, but it is just his love of independence which makes him too presumptuous."

She was right; Lyle Fenwick's ideas were presumptuous. He was like many other men of his stamp, and of his age; priding himself on

rejecting foregone conclusions, and yet too much of an optimist to be able to distinguish between the substance and the shadow. He expressed his thoughts more unconstrainedly than he had any right to do. But there was *power* in some of these thoughts, and in that consisted their attraction to Jocelyn. She was fascinated, and yet repelled; and there were times when she was puzzled and afraid for her sister.

So time went on. An excursion had been planned for a certain Thursday morning towards the end of July. Scarcely a drop of rain had fallen for days; but when the Thursday came, the fine weather seemed to have suddenly ceased. It had rained all the night, and a heavy mist was still wrapping everything in an impenetrable pall. Elsie stood by the oriel window in the large drawing-room, watching the clouds, with an anxious look on her pretty face.

"The grass will be too damp, even when it does leave off," she remarked, losing her patience. "Mr. Fenwick said he would call at eleven

o'clock, to help Hugo with some of the arrangements."

"He will still come, wet or dry," answered Jocelyn, smiling.

Elsie had equipped herself with especial care. Her dress was of dark-blue serge, suitable for wet weather; and the coquettish black velvet hat, with its light-blue feather, set off her white skin and delicate colour to perfection. She was looking lovely, and Jocelyn told her so, remembering how Lyle Fenwick was accustomed to watch her beautiful sister with naïve admiration which he never attempted to disguise.

"Do you think he will come all the same?" asked Elsie, in a hesitating tone, as if only half disappointed.

"Yes, I do, though of course it will be too late for the pic-nic. If it clears off at all, it will not be till twelve o'clock. But I am going out; I can't withstand the attraction of this exquisite morning mist," added Jocelyn in a determined voice, as Mrs. Delmott made her appearance for the day.

"If she doesn't send herself into a consumption

with these mad freaks some day or other, it will be the most wonderful thing I ever heard of," remarked the elder lady with a shudder, as the girl set off across the damp grass, even scorning an umbrella.

It was a day after Jocelyn's own heart. Angry rain had fallen during the night, lashing the earth, and scattering the leaves of the roses. The verbenas and geraniums were lying prone on the garden beds, while the old-fashioned clove carnations and the bright convolvuli, now resplendent in their beauty, were mudded and defiled. Everywhere, even on the gravel-paths, were little rivulets and tiny ponds, through which Elizabeth could hardly have picked her steps. But there was a cool aromatic fragrance in the air, and a certain exhilarating scent in the smell of the wet ground. Streaks of brightness were let in through rifts in the dark clouds as Jocelyn made her way through the shrubberies which skirted the garden, where the fringes ot the larches were glittering with dewdrops, and the leaves of the laurustini were wet and shining with light reflected from their cool, polished surfaces.

She turned amongst the underwood, where there were no regular paths,—amongst the tangled masses of vegetation which were ever her delight. At her feet were mosses like velvet, mosses like stars, and mosses like feathers, mingled with ferns, wild sloes, flowering briony and blackberry brambles in blossom; whilst the boundary-line of the horizon beyond was occasionaily dimly seen—fading, quivering, reviving, half-unveiled, and then again lost in the illimitable distance.

"It is all so mournful and mysterious," she thought. "Mysterions as our own souls, of which we can never know half the secrets. I stand in awe of myself sometimes, as of a dim hidden world, of which I can only have partial glimpses. How self has startled me lately with new surprises! I wonder if the greatest criminals ever suspected, at some comparatively innocent period of their lives, that fathoms and fathoms deep within them lay hidden other and more ghastly things, which might some day start into horrible existence!"

But this melancholy mood, which in her sen-

sitive nature took its reflection from the outward world, was not to endure.

Religion had never been anything more than a theory to Jocelyn, involving much interesting thinking, and a few hard problems to be worked out, which often eluded her grasp, but which she tried to grapple with, as an intellectual occupation. She was not even sufficiently in earnest to be much affected, except with a sort of vague wonder, at the doubt and perplexity, the want of an acknowledged rule of conduct, which, as she had tried to hint to Elsie, she at once perceived in Lyle Fenwick.

"It is a pity he should be staggered by what no one comprehends," she had quickly decided. "But when once a man wishes to believe in what is good and noble, everything else is sure to come right. It only worries me to think how Elsie, who is so conventional, will ever have patience with his eccentricities."

Jocelyn's solitary ramble lasted longer than she intended. The rain was over, the little streams were rushing on with joyous rhythm through the underwood, and the birds were

twittering in the branches overhead, when she was startled by footsteps behind her.

"*You* are not one of the weaklings of the present day; I am glad you are not," said a voice she had begun to recognise, and to think not unmusical. "When next I go in for 'training,' I must be sent in search of you. You have given me one of the hardest races I ever had in my life."

"You don't mean to say that they sent you in search of *me*?" she asked impatiently, drawing herself up. "Can I never be alone?"

"It seems to me that you are rather too much alone. I was informed that a certain young lady had gone out without galoshes, without an umbrella, and even without gloves, and I had a mild hint from Mrs. Delmott, that the said young lady was fit to be deposited in a lunatic asylum. But seriously, do you spend your time amongst scenes like these, in rain as well as in sunshine?—you have rather peculiar tastes."

"Yes, I should have lived in the Damon and Corydon days, or I should belong to a travelling caravan," she answered, unable to resist

his good-humour. "I am up early in the morning drinking new milk, and feeding my pigeons. Now a man's admitted to be 'a man for a' that,' though, as in your own case, he may go without umbrella and gloves; but I *do* rebel against those artificial trammels, which must always fetter us women. Why, for instance, should there be any harm in my being out on a day like this? Isn't it worth a dozen of those negative days which you cannot charge with any special attribute?"

"Just as a woman who has courage to assert herself is worth a dozen namby-pamby negative women," he thought, but was too wise to utter the sentiment aloud. He would as soon have thought of telling her that it was her splendid physique which enabled her to brave chances which might have reduced ordinary girls to the miseries of water gruel, sweet nitre, and flannel dressing-gowns. He controlled his speech, but his look was so intense that she felt it, and shrank from it in every fibre.

"Don't look at me as if you had never seen me before," she said, with an uneasy laugh;

and, indeed, he began to think he had never done her justice.

She was not much above the middle height, but, small-boned as she was, her slimness and activity gave her an appearance of unusual tallness and strength, and Lyle Fenwick caught himself thinking that, though the brunettes in our climate are sometimes yellow and faded, there was something incomparably bewitching in the perpetual radiance of these unfathomable eyes, set in a face which bore the sun-ripened hue of the south. He was conscious that this superb and vigorous woman, with her unusual sympathetic vitality, and the vivid colouring of her artistic temperament, was beginning to exercise an influence over him which he could scarcely analyse or resist. Life had been very pleasant, very absorbing, since he had known her. And yet, *could* this state of things go on for ever? He had a disquieting perception of the real state of the case. He was fortunately not hemmed in by quickset hedges, he reflected; people had not labelled him to this or that set of opinions; he had not hampered himself

by the dry bones of dogmatic theology; he cared nothing for shriekers who might disapprove of his conduct, and less than nothing for the cackle of superstitious beldames. But he prided himself on his principles. His life had hitherto been upright, if warped and indefinite, and he was conscious that there were evils which should either be faced or fled from.

A picture rose before him of the pretty pleader who that very forenoon had made a little *moue* at him for his apparent unwillingness to go in search of her sister. And he knew that Elsie was no longer his fair ideal—that all her attractions seemed to have died out, as far as he was concerned.

"Such saffron-haired girls," he thought, pityingly, "never had much in their heads."

But what then? Could he unsay all his pretty speeches? Could he tell her, "I have been fooling you," and thus, with tarnished honour, gather himself up to be strong? He debated these questions in perplexity, and answered, "No—impossible!" as they walked in comparative silence back to the house.

CHAPTER VI.

MEANWHILE, the internal serenity of the establishment at Dyneford was a good deal disturbed during the long vacation—indeed, there was a recklessness, a dare-devilry, about Hugh Delmott's whole behaviour which his father was ever ready to attribute to those liberal opinions which the young man had imbibed at Oxford, and which Hugh did not hesitate on all occasions to proclaim. There were days when the state of the domestic atmosphere seemed to be over-charged with electricity——when the son was glaring and fuming, the father bland but inexorable, and when even Jocelyn would have preferred the dull uniform life, with no strong feelings to mar the general

harmony which had been led by the family before her brother's return.

Bills poured in as usual, and Mr. Delmott paid them, helping his son, as before, out of his scrapes, but giving him to understand, in stronger language than usual, that his future enjoyment of the good things of this life must depend on his consideration for his father's comfort and respectability. For hitherto Hugo had not taken kindly to these hints. No sooner had the money been paid for him than he set himself sedulously again to the sowing of those "wild oats" which had been the cereal he had principally cultivated during his career at College. That he *meant* to work steadily some time or other, Jocelyn often declared, waxing mad under her father's perpetual reproaches, and always taking the "poor boy's" part, whilst she continued to love him from the bottom of her heart, in spite of her numerous upbraidings and scoldings. But she was now forced to confess that her intervention was useless. Hugo, feeble and selfish in character as when he was a little lad, rewarded her by

flippant jokes and good-humoured nonsense, till in her secret heart his sister admitted that he seemed so hopelessly incurable, it was difficult to live with him and maintain any belief in high-sounding platitudes about the irresistible power of the human will.

"She's superior, you know, and all that sort of thing, fond of looking down upon her brother, by Jove!" the ungrateful fellow would answer, after a more determined discharge than usual of the excited girl's blank cartridge. "That's the way with you women—hit anyone who happens to be down," he continued, regardless of all her remonstrances. "The governor is always riling me, and so are you. As if every fellow who is young doesn't have his swing. I mean to pull up, and be steady like everyone else, in time. But I can't settle down all at once, as if I were born in starched cravats, and long-tailed coats, like the governor's; and he will drive me mad one of these days, hinting that I am a 'cat's-paw,' as he calls it, in the hands of a drunken crew. It is *he* that is a 'cat's-paw' in the hands of a foolish woman."

Jocelyn answered with a sigh, for Mrs. Delmott *was* a foolish woman, doing everything that lay in her power to widen the breach between her husband and his son, whilst unfortunately her obstinacy and want of sensibility gave her a good deal of power. People had been ever ready to submit to her, for very peace sake.

Jocelyn was glad of anything which kept Hugo out of mischief. And therefore she entered eagerly into all the arrangements for an entertainment of a mixed character, suitable to Summer, which had been planned towards the close of Hugo's visit. Elsie was to superintend her favourite crôquet on the lawn in the afternoon, whilst there was to be music for those who preferred it in the house, and in the evening a sort of theatre had been improvised for *tableaux vivants*. The hall had been lined with cloth, and tapestried with flowers for the occasion; and near the lawn, which had been closely cropped, fountains, which rarely played, sent jets of spray sparkling into the sunlight.

Elsie, surrounded by the prettiest girls of the neighbourhood, and dressed in the gauziest of

Summer costumes, with her wealth of hair floating on her shoulders, looked like Titania among the fairies. At least so thought a certain Mr. Sandford, an acknowledged aspirant for the second Miss Delmott's hand, who buzzed about her during the afternoon as a moth buzzes round a candle. She was deep in the mysteries of crôquet when Lyle Fenwick arrived, and the set was complete in which she was playing. But there were many eyes to notice how unnecessarily she flushed as the new-comer reminded her that he was the "vilest of crôquet players," and made his way in preference to the house, where Jocelyn was supposed to be helping her step-mother. It was the first time he had seen the suite of drawing-rooms thrown open, and he was almost startled by the effect. Mr. Delmott, who prided himself on being eclectic in his tastes, and who had travelled a good deal in his youth, had purchased something from every country, to add to the artistic perfection of his favourite property. The floor of the fine old rooms was of polished oak, and was only ornamented by Turkey rugs, with

leopard and tiger skins placed near the handsome carved-oak fireplaces. The ceiling was embossed with tracery of gold, and the covering of the walls was of rich red silk. Over the red silk hung pictures of value—one or two Raphaels, one Carlo Dolci, and one Nicholas Poussin, with Reynold's bewitching children, and Lely's flaunting women. The pictures alone would have made the place remarkable, but there were other article of *virtu*, on the possession of which Mr. Delmott justly prided himself. There were marqueterie cabinets, ormolu time-pieces, rich buhl tables, inlaid marble tables, and one slab of polished porphyry, which the owner valued at an incredible price, to say nothing of the rococo chairs, the Parian marble statuettes, or the fine old china—Dresden, Palissy, and one set of Sèvres.

On this special evening the grand old drawing-rooms were full of life and interest. Mrs. Delmott was arranged with an eye to effect on a blue velvet sofa, near the largest fireplace. The fireplace was decorated with hot-house plants, and its carved oak background supplied the

most becoming foil to her complexion. Very well preserved she looked, and she seemed to have taken to her *rôle* with a sort of martyr-like meekness. The long folds of her black velvet dress (ermine-trimmed and relieved by a diamond necklace) had been carefully arranged by her maid, so as to attract attention by their richness; and the wearer sometimes raised her eyes sentimentally to the ceiling, as if her aspiring soul disdained the bars of the earthly prison-house. She was always suavity itself in the presence of company, and welcomed her guests with an unvarying smile, as they crowded into the room.

Jocelyn was by no means performing her duty, for she had retired to that corner of the room which was furthest from the spectacle.

"She does well in black velvet—there is no harm in that—and I don't desire to hate her," she was saying excitedly to herself; "but I can't forgive her for all those airs and graces. The effect must be ridiculous enough to strangers, but they can't possibly guess how the sweetness goes off in private. Just now, too, that Elsie *does* re-

quire, if ever a girl did, to have somebody to help her." Her soliloquy was interrupted by the voice which she had begun to associate with some undefined superstition.

"What magnificent rooms!" it said. "What a unique portrait of Queen Elizabeth!" Her eye followed Mr. Fenwick's to a portrait ghastly with suffering, with a skull in the corner of it, and Death peeping over the great Queen's shoulder.

"Yes, that was painted by her own order, when her heart was broken—so the tradition goes. I value that starched and still stately Queen Elizabeth, more than all the other things in these rooms. I would give all the gilt-work, marble, and velvet for something really musty and worm-eaten. But you see *we* can count no rolls of buried ancestors. My father purchased that portrait with this house, and the dear old cedars, when the proper owner had ruined himself by steeplechasing, and the direct line of the family ceased at the death of that unfortunate man—his name, you know, was Travers. My grandfather made his money

in America, I believe, and we can only boast of the magnificence he purchased."

Jocelyn was too honest not to tell everyone this, always to her step-mother's suppressed dissatisfaction.

"And were the other portraits also in the Travers family?" asked Mr. Fenwick with the interest of a connoisseur—"that Kneller, with its powerful face, its flesh like leather, and its strong sinewy markings?—that Reynolds with its transparent colouring, and its sketchy suggestiveness, and that brilliant Romney—though I never can quite get over Romney's affected mannerisms? Be sure you don't let Hugo take to steeplechasing."

"There is no saying what Hugo will take to; he is just in his chrysalis state. By-the-by that just reminds me," she added with a start. "Why are you not with Hugh and Elsie, playing crôquet on the lawn? All the younger people are there."

"The younger people!" he repeated, laughing "Well, what are you?"

"I was never young, never like the rest of

them—never that I can remember," she said with such involuntary bitterness that he was startled; "and then there is really a great difference between us. I am twenty-three, and Elsie only eighteen."

"Well—I will explain to you why I came," he said, dropping the subject. "I came to bring you these." And he produced the strips of grey paper, in one of which he had inserted a moon with water beneath it, and a boat on a river, of which the rowers had resigned their oars, and were floating lazily with the tide. A marshy bank with bulrushes was indistinctly seen, and willow-trees of that colour neither green nor grey, when all things are illuminated by a shower of silver light. On the other strip of grey paper he had skilfully used his penknife to indicate a sun which was trying to pierce through a filmy sea-mist. A fisher's boat becalmed by the tide lay helpless and forlorn in the foreground of the picture. The air was vaporous, dull, and hazy, whilst far away in the distance masts of stranded ships, that might look majestic when the shadows cleared, were

only half revealed between the distant cloud-banks.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Jocelyn, who could no longer maintain her indifference. "Elsie is right; you ought to do something worth remembering, in the way of painting, if not of writing."

"Query," he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "I could never stand the apprenticeship. The bias of habit is said to be so strong that few of us can entirely detach ourselves from opinions which were formed from our childhood; and as for me, I am not only lazy by habit, but I have the same difficulty in getting rid of my laziness that most people have in getting rid of one set of thoughts, which they have once allowed to take possession of them."

"But it *is* such a mistake to add to the number of *dilettante* people. If you will not paint or write, why not enter a profession? For instance, why not think of the Bar, and end up with the House of Commons? I would, if I were a man," said Jocelyn, excitedly.

"I have not the slightest ambition in either

of those directions," he added, with another shrug. "I do not know that I should care about it if I could succeed. Time was when English eloquence was something to be proud of—when we said the strongest things in the fewest words; but now——"

"Well, *now?*" repeated Jocelyn, impatiently. "You are certainly the greatest grumbler I ever met with."

"I was only going to remark," he continued, smiling provokingly, "that now, when the declamatory style of the French, and the newspaper correspondent trick of exaggeration, have extended far and wide in Old England, it is more to a man's credit to be able to lend some effective help in working out the prosaic problems of his immediate neighbourhood than that he should indulge in any amount of those pomposities which, as often as not, lead ill-balanced minds in the wrong direction; and there are plenty of big drums and sky-rockets in the world without me."

"You are not worth answering," said Jocelyn, scornfully; but she lowered her voice, for the music was beginning.

Several quartettes on stringed instruments were to be given during the evening, and were to be performed at intervals of time by skilful musicians, who had been imported to Dyneford for the occasion. This music had been arranged at Jocelyn's request, and Lyle Fenwick preserved silence at once, to please her, watching the expression of her face, which was subdued with an unusual sensitiveness in keeping with the exquisite musical vibration.

"Music like that is a rare exotic in England," he said, when the performance had ended. "There are numbers of rich and prosperous people who cannot enjoy squeaking strings, and for them there are the lower pleasures—the eating and drinking, or the spending money on mere show. But I am glad to think there are *some* natures to whom this grand perfection of harmonious sound is a delight pined for as light and air are pined for. Soothing as a sort of mental chloroform, is it not?"

He looked at her as he spoke, and there was something disagreeable to her in the discovery that anyone could read her thoughts.

"I am not accustomed to compare my secret feelings with other people's," she thought. "There are plenty of girls in the present day who find it a profitable employment. What does he mean by lingering here? I wish he would go to Elsie."

He saw that he had somehow given offence, and hastened to remedy his mistake.

"I think you are so wise to introduce violins and violoncellos," he continued, "instead of the pianos, with which we are terribly overstocked. I really never know which are most to be pitied —the operating pianists, who, in spite of hammering away for two hours a day at exercises, break down time after time in the same passages in the same fantasias; or the suffering listeners, who feel as if they were placed on red-hot gridirons, yet are bound to applaud the victimised performers. Bad music should really be put down by law. It has not only an irritating, but a demoralising effect on all who happen to find themselves within earshot of it."

"They want you to sing," said Elsie, approaching her sister at that moment, with

Mr. Sandford in attendance, and Jocelyn raised her eyes admiringly. For Elsie's sunny hair was framed with some fantastic adornment of *tulle* and blush roses, otherwise called a bonnet, but like the nimbus of a saint, and the white gauzy folds of her dress floated round her like a cloud. The girl was too seasoned a flirt to allow herself publicly to betray any pique at Mr. Fenwick's desertion, but her manner was a little more finished than usual as she repeated,

"You must come and sing."

"Indeed, I have no wish to demoralise Mr. Fenwick," answered Jocelyn, so quickly that the effect was like cross questions and crooked answers.

"I don't know what you mean," answered Elsie, who had an especial objection to being laughed at; "Mamma hoped that you would not make any difficulty. Discussions are so unpleasant."

"That remark is uncalled for," said Jocelyn, angrily, the red blood flaming up in her cheeks. "Mrs. Delmott should not charge you with such messages."

"She is like a double-barrelled gun, ready to go off directly you touch her," thought Mr. Fenwick, with a little smile to himself. "One wearies of feeding on luscious sweetmeats, and needs a little pungency at times. I am terribly hard-up for a new sensation, and there would be some excitement in trying to please a woman like that."

"Joyce dear, you forget," answered Elsie, with no loss of dignity, but in her sweetest and most expostulating voice. "Poor Mamma did not mean to offend you, I am sure; but any discussion does always excite her nerves."

"*You* begin, and I will see about it," said her sister, authoritatively. "You need not be nervous, for it is all one what you sing or play to most of the people who are here. They would be just as well satisfied with the 'tum tum' of the Chinaman. *I* generally find nothing goes down so well as a rattling waltz, with plenty of emphasis."

"Amiable!" thought Lyle Fenwick, as the younger sister moved away. But he only remarked aloud, involuntarily, on Elsie's attend-

ant cavalier, "What a creature! like a woman dressed up in man's clothes, or a hairdresser's block; but the world calls him handsome."

"Elsie is worthy of pleasanter company," Jocelyn answered in her coldest manner.

"She can be a wonderful refrigerator," he thought again to himself, and then ventured on a further remark, amazed at his own temerity. "More than one person has hinted to me that they are likely to make a match of it."

Jocelyn looked at him as if she would crush him into silence.

She moved nearer the piano when her sister began to sing. Elsie had chosen a simple ballad,—"On the banks of Allan water;" but the memories of her hearers were supposed to supply the words. Elsie's voice was powerful, but it was not very true. While the melody continued, Mr. Sandford beat time to it, swaying himself backwards and forwards like a tree with the wind soughing through its branches.

"Nice song that," he said abruptly, ceasing his calisthenics when it had concluded; "Ger-

man—wasn't it?" And Jocelyn, catching Lyle Fenwick's eye, was more enraged with him than ever, for the efforts he evidently made to restrain his laughter.

She took care to avoid him till the second quartette had ended, after which a gentleman amateur was persuaded to sing. And amidst the vociferous applauding which followed a bellowing bearing some faint resemblance to that of a bull, Jocelyn advanced to take his place at the piano.

There was a perfect buzz of voices as she preluded on the instrument, rendering a few of Mendelssohn's Lieder with suggestiveness and ideality. More than once, when her fingers lingered lovingly on the keys, she caught herself wondering if Lyle Fenwick was listening to her. She cared little for the fact that the buzz of voices was rapidly increasing.

"People always chatter," she thought, a little scornfully, "especially when anything by a good composer is being played;" and, for her part, she hated showy ornamentation.

Suddenly, however, she broke off into

Mozart's "Addio," and soon succeded in gaining the attention of her audience. Lyle Fenwick listened breathlessly, afraid of stirring, lest he should lose one syllable of the sound. And yet Jocelyn's was no brilliant bravura voice, ringing out like that of a skylark, now soaring, now falling, through difficult operatic passages. Music was rather, with her, a form of worship—the outpouring of her highest and holiest feelings. But though the voice with which she interpreted it was of limited compass, she was so careful and perfectly correct in her modulation, and so certain never to overstrain it, that she succeeded in exactly rendering the feeling of the master.

The trembling accents of the concluding stanza had died away in silence, and Jocelyn, who hated eulogy, was creeping away to escape notice, when she heard Lyle Fenwick saying to one of the most admiring of the bystanders,

"Well, if it is not genius, it is something very like it. She throws her whole soul into whatever she attempts, and she, at any rate, shares that peculiar condition of mind which leads a

certain number of people in every generation to look upon music as the first-born of the Arts."

He spoke enthusiastically, and his lady-listener answered:

"It is a pity she chose Italian. The Italian is a dead language to so many in the present day."

"Well, perhaps you are right. Such songs as Mozart's belong to a high range of pure abstract music, as remote from mere metrical ballads as anything you can possibly conceive. Both are beautiful, in different ways. Some of the canzonets of Haydn would exactly suit Miss Delmott's voice. But can anything give a more perfect illustration of the one-sidedness and blind caprice of our English taste than the war of tongues which always commences directly instrumental music begins? As if the finest harmony were not superior to mere melody! And there was nothing slip-slop about what we heard just now."

Jocelyn hurried on. So he did not class her with the victimised girls who "hammered hopelessly at exercises" and "set people on grid-

irons." She scarcely knew why she felt triumphant that he did not; she was pleased, and yet displeased, and angry with herself. Her one thought ought to be how to get rid of this man. Why had she been tempted to play and sing that evening, if her music were only to open a new path of sympathetic union between them?

"I am a hopeless bungler," she thought, with self-reproach. "My object was to help Elsie, and now my darling looks unhappy."

Meanwhile, Hugo and a few of his Oxford friends were beginning to arrange their *tableaux vivants*, and Jocelyn's presence was imperatively required. Perhaps it was well for her to rouse herself from her perplexities at that moment, and the ascendancy of her superior taste was always deferred to in artistic matters.

The doors of an adjacent ante-room, which had once been a state bed-room, and which was still replete with historical associations, had been closed for an impromptu theatre, and a dark-red velvet curtain hung in heavy folds from side to side of the apartment, so as to

hide the gigantic bedstead which served as a framework for some of the drapery. Plentiful accessories could easily be supplied by the carved oak chairs and the specimens of old armour which had been preserved as relics of past ages in this ante-room.

In more than one of the *tableaux* Jocelyn appeared, but not till she had been persuaded to take part in the representation by the vehement entreaties of some of her new acquaintances.

"I stand excused," she said at first, with a return of her old hauteur of manner. "There are plenty to take their share in the exhibition." But Hugo's angry frown dissuaded her from her purpose, and others soon found "they could not do without her."

Indeed no one in her own family had hitherto suspected her marvellous talent for dramatic impersonation, and it was a matter of surprise even to herself. For the first time the scales seemed to have fallen from the eyes of the Dyneford ladies, and they discerned something superb about Miss Delmott's Southern appearance.

Indeed more than one of them were sufficiently spiteful to whisper to their neighbours, that the red drapery, which formed the ground-tone of the living pictures, must have been chosen as specially becoming to her complexion, which was so unlike their own that till now they had been unable to associate it with beauty.

But Jocelyn was incapable of any such devices; she had not even been aware of her superior advantage in the magnificent growth of her rich dark hair, which floated, when unbound from its artificial trammels, like a dusky cloud below her waist, and which had attained a length that could never be reached by the more delicate and slender tresses of her sister. Her knowledge of Greek customs, and her talent in costume, added greatly to the imposing effect of the Medea which she acted at first to Hugo's Jason.

The picture took the company by storm, so much so that it was loudly and enthusiastically applauded.

"Splendid—almost appalling!"—whispered one of the spectators. "I should really be

terrified to think of what might become of a daughter of mine if she could possibly look like that."

"Capital!" said an old play-goer. "Almost equal to Ristori. That girl has just the strange picture-like look, and just the power of the eye, which was said to be so remarkable in Mrs. Siddons. It is not often you see eyes which can emit such ominous flashes."

Elsie appeared next in a sleeping Miranda, with Prospero standing near her. The attitude of Miranda (which Jocelyn had arranged) was pretty in its artless abandonment, but the expression of the face was too self-conscious for sleep, and the sea, which was represented by folds of blue calico, added to the somewhat ludicrous effect.

"The child is very lovely," thought Lyle Fenwick, who was gazing at the tableau. "But she cannot get out of that stereotyped smile, which she always wears in a ball-room. How perfectly sure she is of pleasing! I think it must be one of my constitutional infirmities to feel an absolute repugnance for that indescribable

something called beauty in women, when it degenerates into a profession."

Why was it? He tried to think. Was it because the absolute assertion of any possible fact almost invariably challenged his critical dissent, and because he—a nonconformist by nature—was disposed to take issue with all settled verdicts, pursuing his own special predilections into paths which wandered from those of others.

The world had said that Elsie Delmott was the more beautiful of the sisters, and this evening he was disposed to think more scornfully than usual of the world's verdict. Perhaps it was because the girl reminded him irresistibly of her mother, and the *rôle* of a recognised beauty not only involved an amount of self-consciousness incompatible with the thing itself, but was peculiarly detestable in Mrs. Delmott.

The next subject had been chosen to exhibit the attractions of about a dozen young ladies who expected to figure in some of the tableaux.

It was Jephtha's daughter mourning with her attendant maidens. The principal part had been forced upon Jocelyn, in such a way as

to make it impossible for her to decline it; and here again her marvellous power of facial expression was so deceptive that in the figure of the Hebrew maiden, with her fingers wandering unconsciously amongst the strings of her lyre, few of the people present could recognise Jocelyn Delmott. The rapt look of intense gazing, as if her soul would pierce through the outer covering of flesh, and the dumb appeal to the silent heaven above her, as if to steady her trembling faith, stretched as it was on an agonising rack, inspired her audience with a sort of contagious enthusiasm. Jocelyn cared little for their plaudits, but a new sense of power came upon her as she heard them, and hers was a nature to delight in power. She flushed, and for one instant looked towards those who were applauding her. During that instant Lyle Fenwick caught the momentum of her earnest look, and turned away with an odd sensation as if he had been magnetised.

The curtain fell, but there was a general demand for another scene in which Miss Delmott could be again introduced.

"We have had her in the representation of two of the passions,—the agony of revenge, and the purity of self-sacrifice," said a loquacious middle-aged lady, who was one of the presiding spirits over the mysteries of the anteroom, "and now we must choose another to represent the power of love. Let me see. Miss Delmott is so admirable in classical scenes. Suppose we have Orpheus and Eurydice. Orpheus covers his face with his hands, and tells Eurydice that to look at him will be death. Eurydice, placing her hand on his arm, answers, "Then I will look and die!"

"What a good idea!" said another; "but who will be Orpheus? Orpheus must not be merely a lay figure,—the whole power of the scene must not rest with Eurydice."

The managing lady looked from one to another of the privileged men who had been chosen to assist at her favourite pastime. There was Hugo Delmott, with his dark and regular features, but he had managed to infuse a smack of brigandage into his appearance, quite out of keeping with the character of Orpheus; and

there was Mr. Sandford, pretty-faced, but insipid, with half a dozen others who did not satisfy her. At last her eyes rested on Lyle Fenwick, who had sauntered into the improvised green-room after the last performance, to offer his assistance in the arrangement of the scenery for the concluding tableau.

"*You* have not helped us at all," she said, "and you are about the right height, and will know how to take the right attitude to perfection."

"I am much too ugly," he said, feigning unwillingness.

"Now you *know* you are fishing for compliments," rejoined the sprightly manageress. "Never mind, you shall call yourself as hideous as you please. It is the *expression* which we want, and one can improve everything else. A slight touch of rouge, a little white—don't be frightened—only a *soupçon*, and the most charming of auburn wigs, will make another man of you. No, we can't let you off." "Now then, Miss Delmott," she added, when, after a little interval, Jocelyn emerged from an adjacent

dressing-room, "you must place yourself just so, and you must look as if death were preferable to being forsaken."

Jocelyn was angry, but ashamed of her agitation. Lyle felt the hand shake which she placed on his shoulder, and noticed that her eyes were no longer soft with feeling, but had a strange appealing look in them, and were like the eyes of a wild deer. She glanced uneasily at Elsie, but he affected not to understand her. He had never been accustomed to any very close examination of his own feelings, and was only conscious that the position was an extremely pleasant one. He looked at Jocelyn, nothing loth, as he had been told to look, and yet all the time he was perfectly aware that he had never looked at anyone else in such a way in his lifetime.

Suddenly she turned from him as if she had been stung, dropped her head into her hands, and stood for a moment silent. When she spoke she was trembling visibly.

"I am sorry—very sorry," she said, "but I cannot go on with this—it is impossible. My

eyes are tired with the gaslight; I cannot lift them properly, to look at anything"; and, without vouchsafing any further explanation of her conduct, she swept into the hall, dignified and passionless, still in her white and gold-embroidered drapery, and with her dark, jewel-crowned head. "Like a statue of Artemis," thought Lyle Fenwick, repeating a comparison he had made when he first saw her. "But what a charming temper she has, to be sure!"

"We had better abandon the scene," he said aloud, in his quietest voice, and looking, with a smile, at the disappointed and dismayed faces. "I assure you I am glad to be released."

And it was he who suggested that Elsie should take the part of Ophelia wandering with her flowers. But as soon as the *tableau* was ready, he escaped into the garden.

For the first time he recognised the awkward, perplexing imbroglio in which he was beginning to be mixed. He began to suspect that he was marked down in the family, and by the world at large, for the younger sister; and, though he had more than a suspicion of the

inferior nature of his bargain, the thought of recent tender compliments rankled sorely in his memory.

* * * * * * *

"What's the matter, old fellow?" asked one of his acquaintances, who met him, a few minutes afterwards, lounging near the doorway. "You look quite ghastly."

Lyle muttered some excuse about the heat of the rooms.

"I daresay it may have made me look a little white," he said.

"Look a little white!" repeated his friend. "Why, it's more than a little. You look for all the world as if you had seen a ghost."

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE Jocelyn had fled to her bedroom, in a state of impetuous remorse for her own short-sightedness, and ready to take vehement revenge on herself. Could not this have been prevented?

"There is a fate against me," she said, as she burst into tears and threw herself helplessly on the bed; and yet she could scarcely tell why she wept.

She remained for some time with her burning face hidden in her hands, and then she shook herself from the thoughts which were beginning to torment her

"I am weak—weak, puerile, and contemptible!" she exclaimed; "and yet I always prided

myself on being so strong! I cannot tell Elsie —I cannot disenchant her. But at least I can cut through my own difficulties. I can forsake this horrible 'society,' and engross myself with my own pursuits."

It was not very difficult for her to carry out her resolution; for, after a troubled night, in which the voices of adulation, the excitement, the lights, and the admiring faces of her audience had been continually before her, interrupting her sleep, she rose to find Mrs. Delmott —whose jealousy had been roused by her stepdaughter's success—unusually cold and distant in her manner.

"I was going to tell you that I thought such exhibitions must be discontinued in the future; they are unwomanly—immodest. I don't know how Hugo came to think of them," she answered provokingly, when Jocelyn spoke to her. "But I don't see that you need shut yourself up; there is a medium in all things," she added, with a slightly dissuasive inflection in her voice.

"The 'exhibition,' as you call it, was forced

upon me; and I don't choose to expose myself to the possibility of such forcing in future," answered Jocelyn, in her proudest tones. "My old way of life suited me best, and I choose to resume it. If I chose to enter a nunnery, you would have no right to interfere with me."

And yet she could not resume the old life; her tastes had changed. She no longer cared for her painting. In past times she had considered books to be like dry stubble, when the outer world was continually tempting her to admire it. But now she was almost terrified at her own new eagerness to explore unaided fresh fields of thought, little suspecting that it was for another as well as for herself that she was anxious to solve the old question which had been asked since the days of Pilate.

With regard to that other she determined to let things alone. His manner to her now was grave, and sometimes distantly polite, so that she had begun to hope she had been mistaken, and that all would come right. For though she would have recoiled with horror at the

bare suggestion of possible unfaithfulness to Elsie, a new idea suddenly flashed on her. Lyle Fenwick, she imagined, looked upon her in the light of a future sister, and only wished to smooth down a few of her ascerbities.

"I am always so excitable that I jump to conclusions," she thought, by no means displeased with this new solution of her difficulty. "They gave me quite a little ovation about those ridiculous tableaux, and I suppose it made me think that everyone overvalued me."

As time went on she resumed her old habits, and not only consented to be in the same room with the man whom she had marked down for brother-in-law, but let him come to the pass of lending her books, and marking passages in them for her perusal.

"She pretends to understand Browning, and would undertake to explain him to me," he said one day, appealing laughingly to Elsie. "I wish you would leave all these controversies to the school-men," he added on another occasion, taking up a deep book with which Jocelyn had seemed to be engrossed, though all the time she was

intensely conscious of his presence in the room. "If my sensorium is not hard enough to stand metaphysics, I doubt if any woman can stand them."

"You deserve to be punished for your irrational theory that a woman's brain is necessarily weaker than a man's," answered Jocelyn, with her face still bent down musingly, as was her wont after reading.

"If I *once* held any theories which were derogatory to women, I have been cured of those theories lately," he said, with such emphasis that she looked up quickly, and ought to have had more than a faint inkling of the truth.

But, alas! the moment was passing in which she could have paused before she allowed herself to drift helplessly with circumstances—a moment in which she might have said, "I will not let a sense of infirmity master me." And she only smiled as he continued:

"What I meant was, that no *man* was ever yet the better for worrying and fretting himself with questions beyond his reach. And I

confess I should be sorry to see women fighting over these bones of contention, for the very reason that they are more impulsive and enthusiastic than men. There are thoughts and feelings which may flow like warm life-blood to their hearts, but which they cannot reduce to the propositions of Euclid. And you must excuse me if I say that many a man's practical goodness goes in inverse ratio to his zeal for orthodoxy."

"It would be terrible if some of us could only believe what we can actually prove," she answered, still musingly. "I daresay many people are Christians just now for the same reason as they would worship a Siva or a Vishnu—because they have been brought up in the faith, and never troubled themselves to think about it. But surely that is a terrible pity!"

"Thou reasonest like a Plato," he answered, with such irritating gravity that she was again deceived by the element of repulsion which there had always been in her liking for him.

"Don't you see," she asked bitterly, "that if

a few more women could reason, if at any rate they could weigh evidence, and detect fallacies in argument, there would be less temptation to men to waste time in these fanciful speculations which unfit them for real work, and make them think too much of themselves? There are many things that are false, for all they are so high-sounding, Mr. Fenwick. Our instinct makes us know it, and our instincts are mostly right."

It was one of her "moral cyclones," as he had begun to call them; but he stood fascinated by her excitement, and scarcely cared to answer her. It was worth while, he thought, to excite her to see her in this mood, with the dark hair thrown back from her brow, the gleams in the wonderful depths of her eyes, and the touch of sarcastic sadness on the eyelids beneath the slightly-arched brows which completed the noble contour. He studied the effect with unconscious cruelty, while she fluttered like some bird trapped in the snare of the fowler—trapped, but not caged, with the blue sky before it. She persuaded herself that it was for Elsie's sake she wished to reason him over to

proper modes of thought. And yet, whenever she returned to the charge, he met and overwhelmed her with his unanswerable *persiflage*. But in his absence she was always ready to make excuses for him—"His honest uncertainty," as she tried to assure other people, "was wonderfully preferable to insincere profession; and, after all, his was only a stage of hesitation common to many progressive natures. He was only trying to sever the false from the true. And if people in general could not think consecutively, what temptation could there be for *them* in the trials which beset a man of literary culture and contentious mind?"

No, Mr. Fenwick was terribly wronged. He never interfered with other people's theories, but always thought it right to encourage aspirations. And it should be *her* part, for Elsie's sake, to remove the cloud of uncertainty which hung over and depressed him. She would make him recognize that Christianity was not opposed to free research, and that the very divisions amongst its members were proofs of ts inherent vitality. Already he was inclined

to declare with Goethe that the human race could never attain to any higher teaching. But —always of course for Elsie's sake—she was very sanguine of accomplishing a good deal more for him. It should be *her* privilege to make him conscious of the stir and beat, the rhythm and loveliness in this world of ours—his future should be no longer shrouded by an impenetrable veil!

A sort of glamour was about Jocelyn's life at this period, and she passed much of her time in a dreamy trance. The unconscious self-deception which was warping her best intentions, was all the stronger because her inclination and her ideas of duty coincided. She was too simple-hearted and inexperienced to be aware that there were chords within her which vibrated at the sound of Lyle Fenwick's voice, or that her excitable nature suffered collapse when he had gone. She was not sufficiently learned in the science of what is popularly called "love," to know that the continual friction of two intellects with the daily discovery of fresh points of

sympathy were likely to open up avenues for unexpected emotion.

Meanwhile Lyle Fenwick was always coming, and Mrs. Delmott mistook the cause for his incessant visits, rallying Elsie frequently on the subject. Jocelyn's conscience had ceased to speak, since she had ceased to examine her own sensations. It was a new and delicious "gulp of life" for her. Young, strong, and healthy as she had always been, she had never been so exactly happy before. And why, she thought, should she stop and analyse the happiness?

As to Mr. Fenwick, he was too well satisfied with being installed in his present agreeable berth to take himself to task for a misconception which led up to so pleasant a result. True, it was Elizabeth's handwriting which always appeared in the dainty little letters of invitation, on monogram-emblazoned paper, which purported to come from Mrs. Delmott; and it was Elizabeth who was invariably seated next to him at dinner. But it was not *his* fault, he argued, if people chose to make a mistake, so long as he did not continue to encourage the mistake.

Of Elsie he thought as of a "brainless, pretty, harmless little darling," who must not be offended or treated with indifference. She was an ordinary *elle s'habille—elle babille* sort of girl; but in comparison with her sister it seemed as if her very love would be bloodless. Elsie's eyes were not continually unfolding "perpetual meanings," and *her* face was not constantly illuminated by "quick turns of thought." But in Jocelyn's presence he felt as if the present was too delightful to risk the hazard of a change.

And so time passed on. The supposed delicacy of Mrs. Delmott's health, and her objection to fatigue herself with travelling, had interfered with the Delmotts' usual visit to the sea, whilst it did not excite much surprise that Lyle Fenwick,—whose house and grounds were near Dyneford Park,—altered his usual programme, and also lingered in the neighbourhood, only absenting himself for a few days at a time, whilst he postponed his usual visit to the Continent.

But as the Autumn days came, Jocelyn's restlessness returned. Some instinct again warned her that all was not safe. Many a time

she had been treading on the brink of a disclosure, and by some intuitive tact had warded off the revelation. And though she had no suspicion of the impetuous words which had been ready to break forth, overwhelming her with their violence, her anxiety was aroused by the fact of Elsie looking pale.

"I wish it was all settled; perhaps they will get on better if I leave them to themselves," she tried to think, as she made another attempt to rouse herself from her languor, and took once more to long wandering walks, only attended by her dog.

Meanwhile matters were worse and worse between her father and Hugo. The lad, who had been amusing himself for some weeks in France and Italy, returned towards the end of September, giving no notice of his intended arrival, but entering the drawing-room unannounced, no longer in his costume of shooting-jacket and knickerbockers, but in a travelling "get up" which was essentially Frenchified. The punctilious father was horrified at the foreign

style of his son's appearance, the olive-brown complexion, which was burnt to the colour of mahogany, and the affectation of a moustache, sharpened by cosmetics. The young man's appearance had always been an offence to Mr. Delmott's fastidious feelings, for there had been more of the ne'er-do-well about his son's swaggering style, than had been at all compatible with the highest birth and breeding. But never before had he been so seriously alarmed.

There was a fine inflexion of anger in the old Squire's voice as he greeted the scapegrace. Anger carefully subdued and mellow, but anger still. He reminded his son that in another week he would be due at Oxford, and that it was important for the interests of the family that he should distinguish himself, in a tone sufficiently sneering to be provocative.

Hugo muttered something about a fellow being "kept grilling at fag at this time of the year." And his father, who looked silently disgusted, but who never lowered himself to spar with his son—took up his newspaper and left

the room, leaving Hugo in one of his worst fits of dogged obstinacy and savage self-will.

"Walter Scott, sir," said Mr. Delmott, as he rose up from the breakfast-table on Hugo's late appearance on the following morning, "wrote of the house of Waverley, that the qualities of honour and generosity were hereditary in it. No man will ever write so of *my* house. You have kept your own family in complete ignorance of your favourite plans and pursuits, you have scarcely sent me a line from Paris or Florence, and doubtless you have had your own reasons for being silent. Unfortunately I made it a point of honour to entrust you with a good deal of money, but I shall consider it my duty to keep you very tight in future."

There was no distinct answer from Hugo; but he looked more independent than usual as he murmured something about the "*haute société Française*," and the benefit of an introduction from one of his uncles.

The old Squire grew scarlet as he answered, with an unusual oath:

"You have kept me in the dark, sir, and I

have reason to complain. I sent you to travel from place to place, and not to stay in Paris. The very pavement of the present Paris would burn *my* feet! There are men tolerated under the present Government who have a detestable reputation, and whose reputation is too often founded on facts."

"Your spite against the French Government deceives you," answered the young man, contracting his lips into the form of a whistle. "*I* am proud of the De Fontarques, whatever you may be."

And then Mr. Delmott's reserve suddenly broke down, and for once, actuated by the intensity of his fear, he even deigned to argue with his son.

"And to what sort of people could the De Fontarques introduce you?" he asked, with trembling lips and unconcealed anxiety. "People who call themselves exclusive, but who have been more or less concerned in all those gigantic robberies which have been organized and carried out during the last thirteen or fourteen years; people who pride them-

selves on their high descent, but who cannot keep up the old traditions, because their own names have too often been dishonoured in scandalous affairs, and whose salons are open to adventurers from all quarters of the globe. Where they come from nobody knows. From Russia, from Turkey, from Hungary, from the gutter. People who live in mystery, who grow rich by hateful intrigue, and who end by imposing on themselves. There is no occasion for us to meddle with French politics, sir; but this I say—that all sorts of adventurers are attached to the Empire, because under the Empire they find facilities for enriching themselves, which they would not have found under any other Government. It may be no fault of the Empire, but so far it concerns *me*, that I would more willingly see you shake hands with the workmen I employ than with the painted women and rogues in straw-coloured gloves who tell lies about their belongings."

"*Pardieu!* the governor is eloquent! He must have had some experiences in his youth. One would think he had been a *Chevalier d'in-*

dustrie himself. But, as applied to my mother's relations, his moralising is out of season," observed Hugo, in an aside which was all the more irritating from the fact that only a portion of his speech could be heard.

And though Mr. Delmott took no notice of it, his spectacles seemed, as Elsie said, to grow brilliant with indignation as—having re-announced his intention of being more careful of his money in the future—he again avoided his son's company by going straight to his own study.

"As if a poor devil who is kept so short of supplies could help running a tilt with chance," exclaimed Hugo, livid with rage, when his younger sister had fled from the painful scene in consternation.

"Do you mean that for a threat?" asked Jocelyn, in terror. "He has sold out a good many shares at a great loss, to pay your college debts."

"The dickens he has!" said Hugo, relapsing into vulgar English, throwing his heels up on one of the best couches, and smoking a consola-

tory weed. "I've not been more extravagant than lots of other fellows."

He was grateful to his sister for her attempts at peacemaking in a way of his own, though he could be scornful and insolent to her at times. He had ever been quite undemonstrative on the subject of his home affections, but Jocelyn had sometimes hoped he cared for her a little. Her hope revived that day when, after much ruminating over his future difficulties, her brother remarked, with more than his usual *sangfroid*, that he "still had the chestnut thorough-bred, and continued to like him;" and proposed to take his sister for a morning's drive.

About noon they rattled merrily through the streets of Dyneford, where the supposed heir was saluted with much cap-doffing by the honest townsfolk, and where his carriage-wheels sped on glibly over the stones, with much danger to, but no loss of, infantine life, which disported itself by rolling about in the middle of the road. About half-way through High Street, they came up with another trap, in which were

two showily-dressed women, with very black eyes and very red cheeks, to whom Hugo bowed with a pleased smile, looking after them as he bowed.

"Who are those people?" asked Jocelyn, with a little surprise.

"They are not of your kind; it would not do for you to know them," he answered, awkwardly.

"Oh! but you took off your hat to them."

"They are nobodies, I tell you," he said, more abruptly.

"Nobodies!" she repeated, as if considering the question—"that would make little difference to me, you know. I never could see why there shouldn't be a freemasonry between women as well as between the opposite sex; but if I were *you*, I would only interchange feelings of equality and fraternity with my own sex."

"What makes you so curious?" he exclaimed angrily, the proud and irritable lines appearing plainly round his mouth, which betrayed the odd mixture of the spoilt boy and the self-willed autocrat, who had inherited a love of

tyranny from his ancestors. "Why are you always suspicious? I tell you I am too old to be plied with your questions. Let's have a truce to all this nonsense."

She had not been suspicious before, but she became so at once. His irritability bewildered her, and made her feel sure that there must be something behind his excitement. And then there was the old soreness of disappointment at his rude style of addressing her. Elsie was becoming cold to her, and Hugo thought her interfering and suspicious. Both of them, she reflected bitterly, had ceased to love her. Oh! if there were only some one really good and reliable in the family—some one who could help her to help these others! Could she not try to aim after a higher standard herself? She had but a confused idea of how to set about it. But she was so far changed that, when her brother's Oxford term commenced, her solitary walks had a new meaning. Jocelyn began to visit the neglected poor. It was one more step in the right direction—one more attempt to think less of self, and to lessen

temptation by trying to create fresh interests.

She was out in this way late on one October afternoon, regardless of the heavy drops of rain which were falling, on a mission to a poor woman who was confined to her bed with an illness which had baffled the skill of the country apothecary. Sarah Ellard had sent for Miss Delmott now in an unusual agony of mind, and Jocelyn had impulsively obeyed the summons, disdaining the attendance of a servant, and consulting nobody on the subject. The afternoon was by no means inviting. October with a painter's brush had been colouring the oak-trees outside Dyneford Park with orange, and tinting the beeches with a deep and coppery red; and blood-red the same leaves lay on the sodden ground, as if a battle had been fought between the contending armies of Summer and Winter. The storms at this season of the year were often intense in their violence, and from the deepening grey which was gathering over the last streak of light on the horizon, Jocelyn concluded that a storm was imminent now. She drew her thin cloak closer round

her, shivered and coughed, then bent her head, as she struggled on against the wind, but she had no idea of going back. The rain was increasing, and she really knew not whether to be glad or sorry when a voice, which had continually haunted her lately, broke suddenly on her ear.

"Out so late, and with this cough!" it exclaimed. "How is it they don't take better care of you at home?"

It never occurred to her to marvel at the odd coincidence that Mr. Fenwick too should be out late, and in the same direction. Prudence restrained her from asking any questions, but she answered,

"My cough is nothing, and one of my poor people has sent to me in great haste; she thinks she is dying. I am afraid the doctor does not understand her case, and our clergyman, as usual, is not to be found."

"Ah! he contents himself with laying down pregnant principles on a Sunday, and even then it's the old story of the 'ass in the lion's skin,' the imposture of stolen wares. It would be a

good deal better if he had some of the enthusiasm of his brother clerics. The poor like a man who speaks with positive assurance, as of things that are as real to him as his own existence. But Mr. Reade always reminds me of a ghost trying to palm itself off as a living reality. His very existence is a melancholy reminder that some organizations can survive when the brains are out."

"I don't see the good of our troubling ourselves about it," said Jocelyn, in her brusque, decided way. "We have not to sit in judgment on Mr. Reade. It is better to do our duty, and be kind to our neighbours. And though, of course, I go to church for the sake of example just once on a Sunday, I never think of going in for half that I hear."

"Yet you do Mr. Reade's work for him, as if you were a curate."

For only answer she pointed to the wild and thickly-clouded sky, with a few broken rays of light flung across it, and said,

"*That* is the condition of this poor creature's mind who has sent for me. I can't think why.

She has not been worse than her neighbours. But don't hinder me with talking; I am in a hurry."

"And that is the condition of a good many other people's minds," he said; and then added, a little sarcastically, in a lower tone—"But how do *you* propose to improve it? By preaching, or teaching, or learned explanation? I should have thought you would have been too wise to try to practise on the helpless. I often think of the woman who said, when she heard her visitor was ill, 'Poor lady, there's one comfort for her, she won't have to be read to and prayed over.' It must be a pleasant thing, no doubt, when one's passport is ready for heaven; but do you seriously think that anyone so young and inexperienced as yourself can aid this poor soul in her 'flight from the alone to the alone?'"

"Ah!" she answered, sadly, "you need not mock me. I am afraid I know too little myself what the meaning of prayer is. And as to explanation, thanks to you, I feel sometimes as if I do not know how to explain anything at all, and there is no time for it in this case, even if

I did. But can you explain to *me* half the mysteries in the world—how the blood flows in our veins, how heart and brain are connected, or how they move our hands and animate our feet? Don't talk to me, and waste my time, for time may be precious."

"I will only see you safely to the door," he answered, "and wait at a modest distance till you return. You will scarcely be able to hold an umbrella against this wind."

He spoke in a tone so much less flippant than usual that she was taken by surprise, and did not like to push her triumph too far, by insisting on his leaving her.

Ominous shades of purple were gathering on the deeply-coloured trees, but Jocelyn saw only the light which was burning in the cottage as as they approached it. She tried to banish all personal interests and emotions, and had no time to think of the rules of conventional etiquette, as a woman with swollen eyes and dishevelled hair met them at the doorway.

"She's taken a turn for the worse," she said. "She's goin' to prove herself true jest as all

the neebors were a-sayin' as there was nothing wrang with her, and I might a-known it, I might, for the oould dawg had his face to the east all yesterday, howlin'. It 'll be a tough job, the dyin' in there. It makes a body creep all over to look at her. Ain't you afeard to be goin' in, Miss?"

Jocelyn waited to hear no more. She hurried into the dirty and comfortless room, where the light cast by the dip-candle was so flickering and dim that it was some moments before she could distinguish the white face of the suffering woman, who was supported in bed by two of her neighbours. Two little boys of about four and six years old were standing by the bedside, looking with half-scared curiosity at the tears on their mother's cheeks. Horror and terror were expressed in every feature of the poor woman's face.

"What shall I do?" she said, with indistinct articulation. "Is there no one to talk to me? I have not been wickeder than the rest of 'em, but I never thought of the dyin' till now. You've been kind to me, Miss; you can pray for me, can't ye?"

A paroxysm of suffering came upon her, but she spoke, gasping again, after a few seconds:

"I don't know the words—I never did know 'em well, and now it's all clean gone from me, as if I had never heard it. But God has sent ye to me; ye can help me, Miss?"

Jocelyn was conscious of a secret repugnance to the task. She could not resist the hunger in the eyes which were fastened on her in eager entreaty; but the request had come upon her so suddenly that she felt sick and chilled with a sense of her inefficiency—brought to her trial, and found wanting. The sense of repugnance overpowered her, and she turned to one of the children who were standing by the bedside.

"Say the Lord's Prayer—repeat it for your mother."

"They've never been taught; there's no Sunday-school here," murmured one of the bystanders; and the trembling voice broke in again,

"Oh! Miss, I'm afeard. I must die, and yet I daren't."

Fear is of two kinds, as Jocelyn suddenly remembered; for words she had heard quoted in her childhood recurred with strange vividness to her memory, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,"—not with the cowardly terror which makes the slave crouch before the lash, but with the loving reverence of child-like awe. That secret, she thought, was surely not solved for her; for the pale and single star—her ideal of duty—which she was endeavouring to follow through winding pathways, seemed to be mocking her far away, dim and inaccessible. What right had she to judge hardly of the agonizing alarm of this conscience-stricken fellow-mortal called to confront the tremendous mystery unaided? And what possible right could she have to pray for her? Death in some cases might be unruffled and passionless, because it was merely an "unthinking cessation;" but in others it must be accompanied by this terrible agitation. What right had she to help others, who could not help herself?

Jocelyn was no hypocrite, but she was painfully aware that others were watching her. The

room swam before her as she tried to pronounce some formal words, but her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth. Her imagination was always vivid, and suddenly there appeared before her a print which she had once seen of a monument in the Catacombs—a specimen of rude early Christian art, depicting the Good Shepherd with something lying tenderly on His shoulders—something which He "who loved us into life" had saved, and was carrying into the fold—not a lamb, but a kid! The room was dim now, because the tears were rising to her eyes. She was scarcely aware that she fell on her knees beside the bedside, and was repeating, in a voice half choked by sobs,

"O Lord, look down from Thy habitation in Heaven, and behold the multitude of miserable people amongst us! It is dark, and we cannot find Thee. Lord, show us the way. Have mercy upon all ignorant souls, who cannot pray for themselves—upon all who groan under the burden of their sins—upon all broken hearts, and heal them; have mercy upon all struggling

with temptation—upon all that stagger in the faith, and help them. Lord, teach us to pray!"

She conld not continue, but broke off into clauses of the "Confession" and the "Lord's Prayer," till, looking up, conscious of a coming faintness, she saw Lyle Fenwick standing by her side, his head bared, and his face partly covered with his hand.

"This is too much for you," he whispered, looking white and anxious, as she tottered to a seat; "you have overdone your strength. I have sent another urgent message to the dilatory parson. He will be here directly—he has sent to say so—and you will do more good by returning to your home."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE storm was raging as Jocelyn left the cottage. But she refused Mr. Fenwick's offer to accompany her. She had seen the look of intelligence which passed between two of the poor women even in the presence of death, as he bent over her, and whispered to her with that expression in his face; and she was bitterly angry with him for attempting to follow her. Like one awaking from delirious slumber, she began to see her actual position. She was frightened at the future, and longed for silence and rest, as shipwrecked sailors long for day-break. She reached home, thoroughly wet, after it was dark, and shunned inquiry by escaping at once to her bed-room. She passed the night in agitated dreams, and met Elsie

before breakfast, afraid, for the first time in her life, to look in her trustful, innocent eyes, and to answer her morning salutation in the usual caressing tone.

"What a dismal-looking day!" she said, walking to the window, and drawing aside the curtain, which let in a prospect of park and garden enveloped in sheets of mist. "You can scarcely see the distant line of the moors. It reminds us that October has really set in."

"Nice, muggy October! It has its own pleasures. I never object to any month when one can ride to the meet."

"Elsie, you remind me of the young lady who objected to the French language because it had not the word 'nice' in its vocabulary—you are so fond of it. Pray, what has the hunting-season to do with sugar-plums?"

"Joyce, dear, you are cross. I hate dismal looks! If anything has happened to vex you, pray forget it. *I* can't think of anything but the next meet, which is coming in a week."

Jocelyn did not answer, and Elsie continued:

"I shall ride Ladybird; but I have made papa

promise to give you a mount on Blucher. You'll get quite out of practice if you don't go out a little more. Lyle Fenwick will be there with Captain Stracey; and we shall have capital fun, if I can only make mamma forget the tiresome fact that Sir James Dalrymple thought fit to make me an offer the other day. I tell her that a title adds nothing to one's rank, if one is by birth a lady, except by way of precedence; and then she reminds me that the family needs building up, and that Hugo has not performed his duty by taking honours, as he was told—as if anything of that kind signified a pin."

Lyle Fenwick again! Would she always harp on his name?

"What have I done?" thought Jocelyn, in an agony of conflicting feeling. "I set myself to prove this man for Elsie's sake. I talked to him as I would never have talked to any other under the sun—also for her sake. What a conceited goose I was to hope I should be able to do him good! She trusted me—would it not be the basest treachery to take advantage of her confidence? And yet I had been so accus-

tomed to be comparatively unnoticed; how could I think of myself at all in comparison with her?"

She looked at Elsie's full pouting mouth, at the dimples on her pretty cheeks, and was conscious of a throb of jealous mortification when she remembered how utterly her own attractions had been ignored by the confident girl in the matter. Could not this sister, so petted and courted as she was—spare her one leaf amongst the bouquets which were being continually flung at her feet? Elsie fancied, indeed, that she cared for Lyle Fenwick—but was it really in her to love anyone but herself? Jocelyn hesitated, and then determined to watch more closely, and to endeavour to form a right estimate of facts. For her whole reason rose up against the sacrifice of her youth, and the happiness of her own life, to what, after all, might be a chimera!

She thought that her conscience was tender, and she imagined she could trust to it more safely than to her feelings; and yet she was seeking for some comforting subterfuge in the

riddle that perplexed her. Very old she felt, though she was only three and twenty—old enough to be overwhelmed by the problem which has baffled the greatest philosophers the world has ever seen—the problem of right—the "sacrifice of self to good" or wrong—the "sacrifice of good to self."

There were plenty of opportunities for watching Elsie. That very night a few friends were expected to dinner, and as the younger sister appeared in a green dress, with the bodice cut square, and diamonds glistening in her hair, the elder listened cynically to her flood of small talk, tempted, for the first time, to condemn her in her heart.

"If I were to try to talk like her," she thought, "I should be perpetually treading on people's sensibilities! I should be like the donkey imitating the lap-dog! For instance, she has the air of knowing everything, and if you come to examine her, what does she know? She catches up clever remarks, and retails them again. I think I should prefer ingenuous ignorance."

That evening Jocelyn tried to avoid Lyle Fenwick. "If any mischief has been done," she said to herself, "I did not do it deliberately. I did not intend to be a marplot. But if I could only make Elsie understand, and give her a hint to let me keep out of the way."

That was not to be. The morning of the expected meet came round. It was cold and clear, with the sky almost as blue as in the height of Summer, and flecked with little windy clouds, and the sun so bright that each twig or fading leaf threw a keen, sharply-defined shadow. The two girls stood at the window of the breakfast-room, ready for the ride. Elsie's habit was a triumph of the art of that master-genius Wolmerhausen—a microscope could not have revealed an unnecessary crease; and it set off to advantage the perfection of her somewhat *mignonne* figure. She had frequently ridden to the cover-side, as she boasted, from "the time she was a scrap of a thing," and had picked up a few words of slang from her brother, which she used effectively, in a mild way, on these occasions, for Elsie could never

really be called "fast." Jocelyn was less well-equipped, and was unusually taciturn. For not only had she hitherto left these expeditions entirely to her sister, so that she had had comparatively little practice in riding, but she dreaded being brought in contact with Mr. Fenwick. Yet Elsie had refused to ride without her; and it was useless to long for some Act of Parliament to interdict the appearance of women on the hunting-field. A way of escape seemed suddenly to be opened to her when Mr. Delmott appeared.

"What is to be done now?" he asked. "Jocelyn can't have the horse I intended for her. Chapman says that Blucher's back has been chafed with the saddle—that must have been the last time you rode him, Elsie."

"It would be too absurd to pretend that I hurt his back. The saddle was badly put on, and I told Chapman so," answered the aggrieved beauty, with a toss of her head. "But I have made up my mind, if Jocelyn stays at home I stay at home too."

"There's Jenny," said her father, reflectively.

"Oh! Jenny will never do. You know we have always said she stands over a little. Papa, what do you think of Madcap?"

"Madcap!" he repeated, in rather a startled tone. "Jocelyn can take her fences when her horse is a quiet one. She has a light hand, and can manage Jenny, who has a delicate mouth. But Madcap—I doubt if she could hold her."

"If she finds her unmanageable, we will turn back together; and you know I never go far," said Elsie, determined not to be balked of her purpose; and as she spoke, she looked pleadingly at her sister.

There was not much time to spend in deliberation. Squire Delmott had been so used to leave his eldest daughter to her own devices, that he had hitherto few opportunities of testing his private conviction that Jocelyn could do anything she chose. Even Hugo was not present to mutter a protest. But Lyle Fenwick, who had a way of looking all he felt, hovered about with a lowering brow as Madcap was brought round.

"You are never going to ride that brute!" he said: "She has grand quarters, a clean head, but a wicked-looking eye. She is a big jumper, I should think; and—and," he added hastily, looking anxiously at Miss Delmott's habit, "your skirt is not short enough—if you got a fall, you might be dragged."

Jocelyn glanced uncertainly at her sister—she had plenty of courage, but was well aware that she was undertaking an expedition beyond her power; and Elsie, who was mounted like a fly on a big Irish mare, and who was using her tiny spur to torment the good-tempered creature, who, knowing what was expected of her, kicked up her hind legs and gave a few perfectly safe capers, for the effective exhibition of her mistress's figure—called out,

"Oh! don't be afraid. Madcap has no sort of vice. We only mean to take two or three fences, you know, and then Joyce will have to give her her head. She won't stand checking, but *I* shall be close by her to see it is all right."

Lyle glanced at the speaker pirouetting on

Ladybird, with her hair glittering like the rising sun beneath her high hat, and her neat little gauntleted hands patting the neck of her favourite animal; and at that moment he felt that he hated her—hated her even for her smoothness of skin and suppleness of limb.

"There is no cruelty," he thought, "like the refined cruelty of vain, self-confident, high-spirited youth, perfectly regardless of how others may wince. I can forgive a woman for being a coquette, but not for being bad at heart, selfish and ungenerous. Fool that I was to call her beautiful! Why, I never saw such an insipid, self-satisfied face in my life; and as for her hair, it may be what the poets call golden, but the poets are easily satisfied."

He was unconscious that he judged Elsie hardly, as he literally ground his teeth, and turned with another beseeching glance to Jocelyn. Gentlemen in red coats were already crowding out from the breakfast-room, where Mr. Delmott had been entertaining them, for the hounds were coming round, and there was no time to hesitate.

Jocelyn felt it provoking that Lyle Fenwick should still linger near her—more provoking still that he said, in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard,

"You are not nervous, I hope, or you must not ride Madcap."

"Nervous! I should think not!" she exclaimed, all the hot gipsy blood in her veins roused in a moment at the tone of dictation which he had dared to assume, and accepting the aid of a groom, she sprang into the saddle—the flapping of her habit as she did so irritating the thoroughbred, which made a spring to the other side of the carriage-drive. At that moment she felt the contingency of a fall to be the reverse of impossible, but the flush in her own eye, with the set look of her lips, was almost as alarming as what the groom called the "devil" in Madcap's.

"Capital! Well sat!" "The mare is evidently prepared for a game!" "Of course the ladies will turn back if the pace is severe," were the various observations which greeted her ears when the antics were ended, and the groom came again to her side.

"So ho, Madcap!" he whispered, soothingly. "Never you be afeard, Miss, you'll manage her. It's all play. She's got no tricks."

Jocelyn heard no more. Everything which passed during the next few moments was like a bewildering vision—the carriages, filled with bright, pretty faces, drawn up on the grass by the covert-side, the groups of men in red coats talking eagerly together, the little town stirred into temporary excitement, and then the huntsman's horn, the crack of the whips, the yelp of the hounds, the thatched cottages flying past, and the geese on the common waddling terrified away.

The smell of the morning air had been pleasant and fresh, but as soon as they left Dyneford the blue sky seemed to be changing to a curdling grey, and she began to be conscious of a bitter east wind, which seemed to parch the skin and dry the blood. Yet all the time Elsie was before her, looking beautiful on her magnificent chestnut mare. She and Ladybird understood one another, and she was going at a rapid stretch, ignoring the fact that Madcap

was certain to follow, with that light, enjoyable carelessness which was an essential characteristic of her merry nature.

"Sir John's pack is in good condition," she called out joyously. "Three cheers for Sir John Fortescue! This is something like the first tug of war!"

Envious of her sister's audacity, and entering into the sensational excitement of the moment, Jocelyn touched Madcap lightly with the whip, and the mare, throwing up her head with an angry snort, rushed past Ladybird with an eager bound, taking no notice of the involuntary grip at the curb.

"Why, she is giving us the lead!" cried Elsie, with a laugh. "Beware of the fences. You'll have to turn back soon. You had better keep steady."

"Steady!"—she might as well have spoken to the wind. Her voice was unheard as her sister flew past her. There was a sound as of rushing waters in Jocelyn's ears, and then the fields were swimming past her, set in by the moors and blue hills in the distance. The phy-

sical exertion seemed to have deadened every other feeling, and she was utterly unconscious of the gradual falling back of the drab-coated farmers and black-coated parson, who had followed a little way in the track of the venturesome ladies.

"Where was Elsie? Where was her father?" There was no time to answer these questions, or even to look for the defaulters, for whenever she endeavoured to interfere with Madcap's pace, the mare resented the affront by rearing suddenly in the air. They were still going at full stretch, when a voice by her side said,

"That's a splendid-looking creature, after all, and your seat is a good one. Keep her well together when she jumps, and don't chafe her by holding her too tight."

Lyle Fenwick spoke calmly, though he perfectly appreciated all the circumstances of the case, but his face was white, and his lips drawn together.

"Elsie is safe enough, now that the mischief is done," he thought, a little unfairly; "but even *she* never rode in a violent way before. I

could excuse the mere frivolity of the girl, but the selfish love of showing off only to gain applause, and at the risk of killing her sister, is utterly inexcusable. She acts the heroine only to dazzle men. She dazzled *me* once, but I utterly mistook her; it was an excess of folly I shall never repeat."

They were coming to the first enclosure by this time, and a line of fences rose before them, weak and broken in some parts, stiff and apparently impracticable in others. One of the hunters who preceded them passed it easily at a break, and Jocelyn, remembering something about riding "to points," made a frantic attempt to pull Madcap in the same direction. She was utterly helpless; the mare's eyes were glittering, her nostrils dilated, and her little ears erect, as she went straight at the highest and thickest part of the hedge. Jocelyn felt the stride as they came closer and closer, and then she was aware of a desperate rush. There was a sound like thunder in her ears, a crash, a plunge, during which she gave her horse its head, and tried to hold on, and in another mo-

ment she had recovered her balance, and Madcap was settling again into her former swinging motion, when Lyle Fenwick, who had joined her, attempted to seize the bridle.

"Are you mad?" he said, literally panting out the words, "or so wicked and foolish that you mean to throw away your life for the glory of a ride? No other woman would have dreamt of putting her horse at that quickset hedge."

It had been far from Jocelyn's intentions to put Madcap at it, but she did not tell him so; she only looked at him disdainfully, as if she could not brook his interference; and he continued, endeavouring to impede her course—

"That mare you are riding will never refuse. I doubt if she ever carried a lady before. She is already mad to go straight across country."

Even as he was speaking, others were dashing past them, and in the momentary struggle, Jocelyn was in more real danger than if she had continued to follow.

"What do you mean," she exclaimed angrily, "by this unwarrantable interference?"

"Mean!" he answered, with a sickly smile,

as he kept his hold on the reins—"you are racking me! I warned you against that brute. Do not you know that I would willingly *give my life for yours?*"

The huntsmen were sweeping past them with the cry of "Hark forrad!" their horses lathered with foam, and enveloped in steam, and the dogs were streaming along, stretching their chins down to the ground, as, with a pain like a red-hot iron at her heart, and a faint involun tary cry, she escaped from him, disregarding the agonized entreaty which followed her, but tearing the reins from his grasp with convulsive energy, her horse shaking its head angrily, and contracting its back as it crashed on in impetuous speed, to make up for lost time.

Madcap and her rider were in "splendid form," as some of those who noticed her said, little guessing that the rider was from this time powerless. The mare passed them like a whirlwind, for her blood was up, and no woman's hand at that moment could prevent her from rushing.

Another convulsive spring, another desperate

leap, with the horse's limbs quivering, and Jocelyn's eyes closed, so that she might not see what she was attempting, and again she was safe—but with death staring her in the face. For she did not deceive herself. Whatever Madcap might attempt with one of those half-nightmare plunges, whether she might rush through the slush of a stream, or over a black abyss, her rider was bound passively to submit to. Her hope of safety depended upon whether she should be able to keep her seat. How long she had to sweep on, with the chime of the hounds, and the twang of the horns, with the fox too game to seek refuge in the underwood, and the dogs feathering about the fields and puzzling out the scent, with her mare tearing savagely at the bit, and people crying spitefully as she flew past them, "How unwomanly!" "How fast," Jocelyn could never afterwards tell. She only knew that her pulses were beating, and that her head was swimming, but that she had tried to smile, and to pretend she was stout-hearted, and that once somebody had cried to her, "You'll get your face cut," and

that Madcap had crashed on over sharp stones, just as she had flown over the stumps of trees, and over deceptive rabbit holes. Straight as a die she seemed to go—quick, swift, and sure—over hedges and ditches, as one after another of the riders ceased to follow. At last she came to a sickening sight, which told that the poor fox had ended its run.

"All such sports are brutalizing," thought Jocelyn to herself, as she turned her back with repugnance, when they came up to her with the brush, congratulating her on her success, and telling her that she must keep it as a memorial to the end of her life. It was no such glory after all to be in "at the death." The tag-rag and bob-tail were there in due proportion, and one or two women came up after a time, whose names it would be terrible to have coupled with hers. She wished the poor animal were alive again, and longed to throw away its tail, as they fastened it to her saddle. It would be uncourteous not to receive it, and to offend the old huntsman; but she was sick at heart and faint in body. They rallied round her, and

called her the heroine of the field. But her father had not kept up with the difficult pace; and when Lyle Fenwick appeared he did not congratulate her. His face was still deathly white, and he was conspicuously cold and silent. Altogether the moment of triumph seemed to be by no means worth the risks she had encountered, and the horrors of the last hour.

that Madcap had crashed on over sharp stones, just as she had flown over the stumps of trees, and over deceptive rabbit holes. Straight as a die she seemed to go—quick, swift, and sure—over hedges and ditches, as one after another of the riders ceased to follow. At last she came to a sickening sight, which told that the poor fox had ended its run.

"All such sports are brutalizing," thought Jocelyn to herself, as she turned her back with repugnance, when they came up to her with the brush, congratulating her on her success, and telling her that she must keep it as a memorial to the end of her life. It was no such glory after all to be in "at the death." The tag-rag and bob-tail were there in due proportion, and one or two women came up after a time, whose names it would be terrible to have coupled with hers. She wished the poor animal were alive again, and longed to throw away its tail, as they fastened it to her saddle. It would be uncourteous not to receive it, and to offend the old huntsman; but she was sick at heart and faint in body. They rallied round her, and

It was well that Jocelyn was spared hearing these comments on her behaviour. It was always the fashion at Dyneford to dress for dinner, and on this occasion she lingered longer than usual over the ceremony, putting on her bracelets, and arranging her dress, as if her elaborate toilet could conceal the want of inward peace.

A few of her father's friends, including Mr. Fenwick, had been invited to remain till the next morning, but she made no apology for having kept them waiting for dinner, as she entered the drawing-room, trying to walk calmly, and to speak in measured tones, as if the strange episode of passion and agitation which had taken place only a few hours before, could be blotted at once from her memory. If her father continued to give hints of disapproval, they were wasted on Jocelyn, who neither heard them, nor saw the aggrieved look on her stepmother's face. She had not allowed herself time to think. Once or twice, indeed, she passed her hand rapidly across her forehead, and wondered if she were in a dream. Elsie, in a flutter

of pale green muslin and ribbons, looking as though she were a water-lily, seemed to be a part of her dream, and Lyle Fenwick seated by her sister's side, and paying her the same polite attentions as usual, was a more terrible part of it still.

He had a gigantic amount of confidence in himself, he believed in his own strength, moral as well as physical, and yet here he was in a position which an honourable man could scarcely own, even to himself, and she could not believe he would be too weak to face it.

"No," she thought, trying to shake herself out of her stupor, "surely we are on the eve of a horrible crisis."

And then she noticed for the first time that her sister seemed tired, and that she had large circles under her pretty blue eyes, with a spot of colour burning on each cheek. What had she noticed? Jocelyn asked herself this question, no longer in doubt as to certain facts, yet hoping to be able to drift on with circumstances, without shaping her course by any definite decision.

"Elsie is so childish, and easily to be comforted," she thought. "She is like a shallow brook, babbling and racing over the stones. How can she possibly know the meaning of painful emotion? Now that I can no longer pretend I do not know the real truth, how absurd it will be to go on with the farce of making believe! And yet must I give up my whole happiness for a fancy of this child's? Surely the sacrifice is beyond all reason. People can't act on such overstrained notions of honour; the world would come to an end if they did."

Her mouth felt parched, and her hands were trembling. She longed to be alone, that she might pace restlessly to and fro her room, that she might clench her hands, or do something violent to help her to control the inward fever which was consuming her. And when at last the time came that she could make her escape, she threw open the casement of her heavy, mullioned window, and leant her head out in the cold night air. The acacias were bare and leafless now, the berries of the mountain-ash could not be seen in the darkness, and there

was nothing left to remind her of the Summer, when all had been vocal with the music of the nightingales. But she could just see the crescent moon above the top of the fir-trees. How calm, unconscious, and above all human pain it looked, whilst her heart was throbbing with conflicting emotions. Yet calm she thought was surely not the highest good; at best it was only a negative state. A few precious moments of intense life, when her pulses could be tripled, seemed to her preferable to years of stagnant quietness.

"Give me life—life in real earnest," was the cry of her heart. "I can never again endure a hum-drum existence."

Still she struggled like a bird to break free from the meshes which were beginning to hem her in, and tried to attempt that moral dissection, which, to a nature like hers, was absolutely intolerable.

"I must conquer this lurking feeling," she thought. "I did not know I had such a selfish black spot in my heart. I must and I will be loyal to my sister. What am I that I should

darken the sun of her life? What right have I to steal a good that once had been hers?"

And so the greater part of the night passed in those attempts to reconcile black and white, in which we all find it difficult to keep one colour from running into the other. By the morning Jocelyn was not much nearer the solution of the problem, but she rose early, and sauntered into the garden. One of the heavy mists, which were usual in these Autumn mornings, had not yet cleared away. It was beginning to fall in small drops of rain, and whole armies of dead leaves lay unswept in some of the more forsaken paths of the shrubbery. She turned impatiently from these paths.

"I never like walking on fallen leaves," she thought. "I feel for them; they seem to suffer as they crackle beneath my feet." The contrast was greater than ever between this raw damp morning and the glory of the Summer days, when there had been a vast superfluity of beauty, and when she could thank God for the mere fact of her own existence.

"Such days," she had once thought, "would

never have been made—we never should have been gifted with an inward sense to drink in their loveliness, were we not destined for immortality."

Once it had seemed sin, a murder, of the sunshine to stay indoors. But now—her heart ached for the birds, for herself, and her favourites. In the fervid heat of the Summer there had been still shady spots of shelter for them—but what did the patient songsters do, who remained in this climate in a long, continued drizzle like this? How disconsolate they must be amongst the dripping branches! Did *they* lose hope and instinctive faith as she was losing it?

She glanced up, in her soliloquy, at the sharp angles and gable ends of the house—the Elizabethan façade, which she especially loved; she always avoided the Inigo Jones side—it suited Elsie and her mother, but Jocelyn hated it. As she looked up she heard footsteps turning the corner, and in another instant, whilst she was determining to quicken her pace, she stood face to face with the man she dreaded. Their eyes

met, and she instantly dropped hers, endeavouring to pass Lyle Fenwick as if they were unacquainted. But he was not to be so turned from his purpose.

"You must admit I have been very patient," he pleaded, "for I have been waiting all this time to speak to you again in private."

"I do not understand," she said, trying to speak angrily, "by what possible right you think yourself privileged to dog my steps. You know that I do not wish to speak to *you* in private, and therefore your justification is only a new insult."

She looked at him as she spoke, uplifting the dark fringes which had hid the large pupil spots he loved to watch in her eyes—and for that look he forgave her the sharpness of her speech.

"I can afford to be patient," he said. "I will wait as long as you please; but sooner or later I must have my answer; and meanwhile, don't speak to me as if you hated me."

"You know well enough," she exclaimed, still desperate, "that you *do* insult me by the way

in which you try to speak to me. You dare to talk to me in a style no woman can mistake, and *that* when I have always looked upon you as the affianced husband of my sister."

All prudence, all reticence had left him now; he answered angrily in his turn,

"Who gave you the right to imagine such a thing? Your sister is a lovely piece of wax-work. If, with that perfect face, she brought a mind as some women do, I might be much obliged to you for choosing my future wife. I have flattered her, I know—no one can help flattering her. But talk to me about love—love in connection with *her*. Why, love, in the sense in which I believe in it, would spoil the dimples on her cheek, it might bring a wrinkle on her pretty forehead. Understand me once and for ever—you are under a mistake; it is you, and *you* alone, that I love, with every fibre of my being."

She glanced at him again, frightened at his compressed lips, at the lines, full of pain and self-restraint, on his blanched face, and all her simulated anger melted away. It was a mo-

ment which she remembered to the end of her existence.

"I want to tell you," he continued, in a softer voice, "that I owe you a great deal—more than I can ever explain to you. I do not say that you are perfect—on the contrary, you are full of faults; but true gold is malleable—it requires alloy before it can take shape. And you, with all your faults, are so single-minded, so intelligent, so pure, so earnest, that, from thoughts of you and communion with you, I have gained hope and strength which I never thought to find. Before I met you, I was very much alone in the world; I had no warm relationships, no ambitions, no wishes—I cared nothing for success, and human life used to seem to me but a stale, dull, unprofitable thing at its best. But since I met you, I have dreamt of new and, hitherto, unimagined happiness; my pulses have beat with new hopes. I am glad to live; I begin to think of a great hereafter; and together we——"

She felt the necessity for interrupting him, yet, when she did so, she could scarcely speak.

Her breath seemed to choke her; but at last she stammered out:

"I am very, *very* sorry, but such half-heathen fancies as you speak of could be worth nothing if we realized them; such hopes would soon vanish away. Your imaginary sun would be like a painted one, on a painted sky; and when you found it was imaginary, there would be utter desolation for us. I can only repeat that it is Elsie who loves you."

"Elsie, and not *you*, after what I have told you?" he answered, a little taken aback. "You may resolve what you like, but I cannot give you up. Would you sacrifice *my* life as well as your own?"

"There is no question of sacrifice" she tried to answer coldly; "I think you have been very fortunate in gaining Elsie's affections."

"Let me have the truth," he exclaimed, in his most vehement manner. "I cannot offer that poor child a heart which is yours! I cannot act an accursed lie! My conscience is too healthy to suffer for a delusion, and I cannot pretend to love her when you know I only care for you."

Jocelyn roused herself again. She could meet him more easily in this savage mood.

"Leave me!" she repeated, hotly,—"I entreat you to leave me, before you make me repent the humiliation to which you are reducing me. My relations with you can never be altered."

"It is enough," he answered. "You are like the rest of your sex—you would condemn me without a pang to the desolation which is a reality; the pain and the outer darkness are nothing to you. When I met you first, I was alarmed for you. You seemed to have too much excitability, and too much self-confidence—faults I saw in myself. But I soon learnt to believe you had noble qualities, which would not allow you to trifle like others of your sex. But, oh! I was mistaken. It seems you meant *nothing* when you talked with me, and let your glances meet mine as they did—*nothing*, though my soul has grown so closely to yours that the wrench which tears it away will leave it torn and scarred for ever! But do not deceive yourself. We can never now be friends; the

woman I loved is as if she had never existed."

They were in sight of the house, when he left her abruptly. The morning was yet early—it was hardly nine o'clock; and Jocelyn, in her desperation, suddenly resolved to go to Elsie, and make one effort, if possible, to convince her of her delusion.

About half an hour afterwards, she knocked at the door of the girl's room. Elizabeth was awake, but she was lying open-eyed and restless on her bed, her beautiful hair spread over the pillow. Jocelyn bent over her and took a lock of it in her fingers. In its tint it reminded her of that curl of a celebrated beauty, of which, after the owner had been more than a hundred years dead, Byron and Leigh Hunt had collected the hairs. Instinctively the lines occurred to her memory:

"Dear dead women—with such eyes too!—what's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old."

And, with a superstitious shiver, she looked again at the little sister whom, hitherto, she

had loved so tenderly that, if Elsie's little finger did but ache, she herself had been ill at ease. Her conscience told her that her heart had been narrowing to her of late, and she was ashamed of herself for that narrowing, and hated herself for it.

There was something pathetic in the expression of the large blue eyes, and the complexion, which struck Jocelyn as more transparent than usual by daylight. She did not like its whiteness, set off as it was now by the pretty lace curtains and blue silk hangings, with blue and silver paper, for Elsie had studied becoming effects even in her bed-room. She was looking very weary, and had been drinking a cup of tea.

"The tea is not good," she said with a yawn, pushing it away with a petulant gesture.

"You have not slept, dear," said Jocelyn, plunging at once *in medias res.* "Something is worrying you."

"I am so tired this morning."

"And yet you were very silent last night; you had nothing to tire you."

Another yawn, succeeded by another little vexed gesture.

"I did not choose successful topics, so it was of no use for me to speak."

"Elsie," she answered slowly, looking at her steadily, "you are surely not jealous of—of *me?*"

The blood suddenly rushed to the young girl's face, and left it again deadly pale.

"I suppose I may share the portion of one of Eve's daughters, and be naturally inquisitive without being jealous," she answered after a moment's pause, trying to speak carelessly. "Of course I can't help noticing certain things. Why, for instance, did you and Lyle Fenwick meet each other in the garden in the rain this morning? Was it by appointment? It looks strange, to say the least of it."

It was now Jocelyn's turn to be confused. How was it she had forgotten that, in the absence of the roses which bloomed on Elsie's balcony in Summer, her window commanded the path by the acacias, and the picturesque side of the house where she had just parted from Lyle Fenwick.

And yet she was not to blame for the meeting. But she hesitated to gain time as she fidgeted with the lace handkerchief and carved sandal-wood fan, which were lying on her sister's dressing-table. After a pause she spoke.

"We neither of us mind weather, and we happened to meet."

"Joyce, can you not tell me what you were talking about?"

There was no mistaking the tone of eager entreaty. She, who had made many hearts ache, was having her turn, there could be no doubt of it—and Jocelyn, yielding to a generous impulse, answered in a low voice,

"Yes, we were talking about *you*."

In one sense the words were literally true, but Jocelyn had forgotten, in her hard necessity, that the essence of a lie consists in its conveying a false impression.

She had to act the lie out, but the big dark eyes did not flinch beneath the gaze of the glistening blue ones, though she felt guilty, and shivered as Elsie cried eagerly,

"About *me*? Then that explains it! He

was speaking to you about *me;* but isn't it rather strange he should not speak to me straight himself."

"Certainly hers is not a nature prone to suspicion," thought Jocelyn, as she answered sadly, "He does not do things like other men, he is a strange mixture."

"You think so—is he in earnest?"

"Is he in earnest about anything?"

"What do you mean?"

"He wants ballast."

"So do other people," exclaimed Elsie hotly.

"He would be better with something to do. How he can dawdle his life away like this, is an enigma to me."

It was useless to try to disenchant Elsie.

"You can't shake my faith in him—I believe in him," she repeated more hotly still, and then burst into sobs which she tried in vain to suppress.

Jocelyn could bear it no longer. She went to her, pillowing her head on her shoulder.

"Darling, he is not worth all this," she said. "He is neither handsome, nor very rich, nor

very good, for you know what the world says of him; not that I care much what it says myself. He may have faults and wrong ideas, but I judge him not by his ideas, but by his life. I believe in the old proverb, 'The wasps attack the finest fruit;' but *you*—you must expect to find him ostracised by a good many people; and you have youth, beauty, and riches on your side—you ought to have the best possible choice of everything. How, for instance, can you answer the world when it asks you even what his opinions are? Do you know yourself anything about those opinions?"

"That is a sort of question I can hardly put to him," sobbed Elsie, taking offence again. "But I know, in his practice, he is very good; and then he *may* be ugly, but it is an ugliness I like; his great dark hands can do beautiful things. I should have thought *you*, at any rate, would have appreciated him."

Jocelyn's conscience gave her another twinge, but she answered more pityingly,

"Don't shake like that! You are free; you have all your life before you; you may have

made a mistake—and supposing you have, do you mean to be one of the ridiculous people who kill themselves before their time comes for dying, and all for an idea? I thought better of you!"

"Never mind what you thought—only stay and help me. Don't talk to me—I can't bear it! You were always so kind in troubling about me—always one of the last to think about yourself," sobbed the younger sister, with various other incoherent ejaculations, as she closed her blue veined eyelids over her languid eyes, and let her little head droop like a flower heavy with dew.

Of course Jocelyn promised her help, in spite of the inward misgivings which were gnawing at her heart. And equally, of course, the far-off look vanished from her face, and the mother's yearning replaced it, as, in the depths of her desolation, and the supposed ruin of her own life, she cradled the tender creature in her arms, not daring to stir, or to alter her attitude till the low, regular breathing told her that Elsie was asleep.

Then, and not till then, did she venture to give way to the storm that was sweeping to the very foundations of her being. Alone, and on her knees, she endeavoured to solve the riddle of her existence. It seemed as if a terrible nightmare was oppressing her. Her spirit panted in the darkness. Was there to be no peace for her either in heaven or earth?—nothing but struggle with her own vehement will—with the skies as brass above her, and the continual discouragement of unsolved enigmas?

The questions of her childhood recurred to her again. "Why was I born when I was not wanted?—when, if I had been swept out of existence in the next moment, as if I were of no more consequence than the ephemeral insects which sport in the sunshine, it would have been better for the two people who love me best on earth—better even for this one little unimportant family-life, and nothing to the great world that goes on outside it." It was strange, and yet was there not always of necessity a waste going on in this earth, teeming with unrecognized forces as it did—a waste of

love, a waste of strength, a waste of genius, a waste, almost as it seemed, of goodness? She did not know much about it, but she *did* know that she had to try

> "To win another and a nobler life
> Out of this earthly change and weary strife;"

and she forgot that this was to be done by living the Truth in the simplest matters of her everyday life, and that to violate that truth for any mistaken notion of self-sacrifice, was to distort the first condition of her search after its existence.

No wonder that she rose unrefreshed and unsatisfied from her knees; the soughing of the wind through the branches of the trees sounding to her like the sobs of distressed human creatures. The whole world seemed to her to be distorted and out of tune; the deep waters were going over her soul; she could not face the future which was before her with calmness, but she repeated to herself—

"Elsie, at any rate, must not suffer; *her* life must be all sunshine. I am a thousand times

stronger to suffer than she is. Only one thing remains to me—to disgust him with me, and *make* him love *her*—and I don't despair of doing it."

CHAPTER X.

FOUR days passed before Lyle Fenwick appeared again at Dyneford. He had attempted to keep away, but his longing to see Jocelyn had overpowered his resolution. In truth, he had been rather attracted than repelled by the *fracas* which had taken place between them; and he by no means considered his rejection as final, though he bitterly lamented the imprudence which had called forth such angry and indignant words.

He would have liked to return to his old relationship with Jocelyn, and to have endeavoured to win her to him by degrees, without startling her by revealing the depths of his passion. This had once been his plan, but now

it was impossible. *That* had taken place between them which could no longer be ignored. The first time he saw Jocelyn after the stormy interview in the garden he turned as pale as if he were recovering from illness. But she had no such want of self-control, and she gave him her hand quickly, without embarrassment.

"We had all been wondering what had become of you," she said, not even changing colour as she looked in his face.

The words were simple, but the alteration in her voice startled and irritated him. A change had taken place in her; he could not define it. To ordinary observers, it was the same expression, the same smile; but to him it was as if the soul had forsaken its shrine. The frame was the same, but the spirit had fled. The counterfeit snow Florimel, which the witch had conjured up, was not more unlike the pure flesh and blood reality than the Jocelyn of the present was to the Jocelyn of the past. There were no more rapid alternations of feeling, no more tidal moments of passionate emotion, sinking again to the ebb of haughty gravity.

He missed the fits of "temper," as he had been wont to call them, for, instead, there was a hardness—a want of shadow about all she did. She was even more expansive than before, but something jarred upon him in her talk. A musician would have said that their thoughts had not the same tonality. The workings of his face betrayed that he was not callous. No "tinkered-up truce" could content him in a case like this. He determined to discover the truth, whatever it might cost him, and, meanwhile, Jocelyn's object was to avoid meeting him alone. For days she succeeded, but at last his vigilance defeated her caution.

She could not remain a prisoner in the house. Her sensitive nature, which had always been so dependent upon the sights and sounds of the outer world, would not let her surrender her usual walks. On one morning, late in the month of November, she had risen, weary and unrefreshed, from sleep which had been broken by continual dreams. It was a dull, grey morning, when everything looked indistinct, and when a long level bank of clouds lay veil-

ing the horizon, just as regretful thoughts lay heavily on her heart. Yet she had put on her hat, and, accompanied by her faithful dog, was wandering through the damp paths of the park, where the last dead leaves, now too sodden to crackle beneath her feet, made the way slippery with rottenness as she passed. The mysterious look in the sky, in which she sometimes delighted, now seemed to oppress her with a sense of miserable thraldom, as if Infinity itself were unsearchable darkness. The poison which she had received into her system was continuing to work. Her senses were so dulled that she did not even look round when she heard a crunching sound on the gravel beside her. Of course it was Mr. Fenwick; and, most unfairly to herself, she seemed to have a dreary conviction that she had known beforehand he would be haunting this walk. The conviction so irritated her that she was more like her natural passionate self as she turned to him, like an animal at bay, her face dark and rigid, her haughty brows bent together.

"What do you mean," she asked, in her

fiercest tone,—"I ask you again, as I asked once before, what you can mean by continually dogging my footsteps in this unbearable way? Am I to complain to my father, and so hinder your engagement with Elsie, when you well know it is only because she likes you that your frequent visits are tolerated here?—or am I to set Neptune at you, as if you were a common tramp?"

He was white to the very lips, and yet he laughed and answered with a slight sneer:

"I like to see you in a passion—it is very becoming to you. Go on—taunt me as much as you like; it is all true. I *have* haunted this place. I have been like a ghost flitting up and down your usual walks. I knew you would come; you are too much of a spiritual epicure to remain indoors. There is something irresistibly inviting in the 'calm decay' of a day like this."

"You had better have studied the 'calm decay' in the fields outside," she answered, without meeting his glance, and trying to assume her usual manner. "It is so dismal here; it makes me shudder."

"It is a graphic page of history written in stone," he answered, looking at the Elizabethan terrace. "I picture it peopled with men and women, of other habits and other ways of life from ourselves—perhaps truer ones. As to reading history in books, it makes me wonder that the whole human race was not long ago so disgusted with its own impotence as to extinguish itself by one simultaneous act of suicide.

"You are still a misanthrope," she said, wearily.

"Misanthrope!—you are right," he answered, passionately in his turn. "Where are the saints in this world? They may *have been*, but their 'empty niches' stare at us now like 'hollow eye-sockets.' Before I met you, I had not quite settled down into disbelieving their existence. And after I met you, the current of your faith set so firmly in one direction, that it seemed to be drawing me with it. Your very existence seemed to be a proof to me of much that I had doubted. Well, it is all over now. You were amusing yourself, and were no more in earnest than the majority

of women. I thank you for recalling me to the regions of common sense."

Had it been so? She heard his words with a painful shock of surprise.

"Why do you look at me in that way? What have I said?" he exclaimed, as she fixed her eyes reproachfully upon him.

"You have said what is terrible, but I forgive you for your bitterness."

"Bitter! It is enough to make any fellow feel bitter!" he answered, in the same tone.

"Matters of such import cannot hang on such small ones. Let me entreat you, for Elsie's sake——"

But he interrupted her by a torrent of words.

"Don't deceive yourself by that fiction any longer—for you know that you have never seriously believed in it. But, for the sake of *my* belief in human nature, only give me the reasons for your conduct. Let me know you care for me only a little, and then, perhaps, I may endure through the years without you. Anything will be better than having to think

of you as if you were a common, heartless flirt. But if," he continued, entreatingly, "it is only some social dilemma which ties your tongue, tell it to me boldly—leave it to me to conquer. Oh, you women, how you are hampered by trivial difficulties! You will dare nothing to give us men crumbs of comfort!"

She did not answer; she felt as if she were turned into stone; and if she had wished to speak it would not have been possible. He was forced to continue—

"The bitterest enemy can give a *coup de grace* and make an end of it."

The blood was ebbing slowly again to her brain; she thought she should have reeled, but he did not notice it. There was nothing for him to observe in her attitude, but there was a new light in her face—the look of a settled purpose as the slow labouring of her breath just allowed her to whisper,

"*She* loves you; she will die if you leave her."

"She?—you misjudge her," he said, with his bitterest laugh. "I am nothing to her but a

new amusement—the latest trophy to be drawn in her triumphal car. But all women are alike—more disturbed at the beating of their own pulses than at the misery in the world."

"And *men!*" she echoed, imitating his sneering tone, as she strove to crush back the turmoil of feeling, and to answer as bitterly as he did from the depths of her wild, aching heart. "Is it not a refined form of selfishness which *men* call love? If they really loved a woman, would they have any thought except for her happiness? Would they persecute her as you persecute me? I tell you the days are past in which sentimental lovers could narrow the world to their small horizons, and get sensible people to listen to their petty trickling griefs. There is a larger and grander music going on around us now. There is work enough to be done which will cure what you call 'love.'"

He grew white again to the lips, but he did not wince at her sneers.

"God forbid," he said, "that I should profit by an unwilling sacrifice. Tell me—I think I have a right to ask it," he added presently, as

if inspired by a sudden thought—"is there anyone else—are your affections already engaged? Don't be afraid to answer; your confidence will be sacred."

She moved her head. The movement was involuntary, or she afterwards tried to think it was so.

Till then he had not despaired, but a sudden darkness came before him. He put out his hands blindly.

"It is enough—I am answered," he said. "It I have anything more to say I will write it."

She knew then that his heart was dead within him, but the force of irresistible fate seemed to be upon her, the delirium of self-sacrifice which drowned the voice of reason.

"If I gave myself to him," she thought, "it would be a self lowered and disgraced, with an ideal lost."

And so, though the blood beat in her brain, and the tears welled to her eyes, she allowed him to go without a sign of hesitation.

And he *did* write, on the impulse of the moment. She received the letter within an

hour or two; received it as she sat alone in her room, pressing her burning hands upon her aching head, as if to deaden the vibration of the hammers within. The letter told of his intention of leaving Dyneford for a few weeks, and then returning to engage himself to Elsie. He had already written, he said, to Mrs. Delmott, and he left it to Jocelyn to make it all straight with her sister in his absence.

"I do not forget your words," he wrote. "Forgive me for having to be reminded of what principally concerned your sister. 'She *is* my sister,' you said, 'and she cares for you.' I am immeasureably indebted to her for caring for me; but, for *her* sake, it is all the more necessary that I should absent myself from home for a time, and endeavour to free myself from the indefinable influence which you have latterly exercised over me by your very existence, by the fact of your presence, by the spirit which has shone through your looks and gestures, to say nothing of your words and thoughts. While such an influence is allowed to exist, it is difficult to assign limits to its im-

portance, and you can well understand that I must try to forget it."

There were no more reproaches, but she could not be content.

"It is all coming round as I wished," she said, with a revulsion of feeling. "I worked to accomplish this, and now, after all, I am only half satisfied. I suppose in time I shall see the fruit of my pain. But it is true—terribly true—that my affections are engaged. I shall never love another, and, young as I am, my story is ended. He was mine—all mine—passive at my feet; and I cast him away for a mere scruple, in which I was perhaps, after all, mistaken. He *did* flatter her vanity—but was he bound to her for that? What wrong had he done *me* that, when he told me all the truth, I should try to wrench every thought of him out of my heart, and perhaps—perhaps ruin him for life?"

For the first time it seemed as if she remembered how a secret stab to the affections, of which only two people in the world may be aware, may convert a man, who might be

otherwise cheerful and useful, into a sour fanatic, or a rebel against society. If Dante had married Beatrice, or Byron Miss Chaworth, the whole tone of their writings, as she reflected, might have been different.

How terrible it was that she could not deny herself the sympathy for which her spirit craved without making another personally wretched! She tried to think of her own brief life as if it were very small and unimportant—a little isle in the wide sea of Time; but yet, in spite of her efforts, the opposite forces of her nature seemed to have been roused into an intensity of collision which terrified her. Generosity and haughty pride, passion and self-denial, contended within her for the mastery; whilst, with the clairvoyance of her ardent imagination, she seemed to see the dilemmas of her future life through "other organs than her eyes." She knew now that she had been untrue to others as well as to herself, but it seemed to have been an involuntary untruthfulness. She could not reason about it; the powers of thought seemed to be almost gone.

"I love him," she could only repeat in dreary monotone to herself, "and he returns my love. It is against all nature that we should be separated; we were made for each other. A happy marriage would have been the only thing to save him from misery. And yet I must meet him daily, hourly, in the future, and never betray that he has been anything to me. My God! have I not imposed on myself a penance too heavy to be borne?"

She was utterly unaware of the rigidity of her muscles, utterly unconscious that her hands were tightly clenched, till the nails were almost penetrating the flesh. The wild day sobbed itself to rest as she still sat looking at that letter in the silence of her room. And when, after the lapse of another hour, she lighted a taper, and watched the fragments of paper consume, having settled it in her mind that she must never keep one word of Lyle Fenwick's writing, she felt very calm and strange, only tired—more tired than she had ever felt before in her life. It was as if flakes of snow had fallen on her noiselessly, and subtly,

quenching the fire within. She had her will; she was or she ought to be—a martyr, a heroine. But the heroism had cost her dear; her face had aged, every line in it had hardened and grown defiant.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

THE Winter days passed somewhat strangely for Jocelyn. A blank had come into her life, but the uncertainty was over. Lyle Fenwick was almost a daily visitor at the house, but he was her sister's betrothed husband, and she thought she could never now regard him in a different light. Jocelyn had been the first to break the information to Elsie, and a joy which it was in vain for the young girl to attempt to conceal, lit up her face when she heard of Mr. Fenwick's expected return.

"He thinks I can never care for him, but I do—I *do!*" she said, as the tears came into her eyes. "I will tell him so when he comes back. Why should I withhold the truth from him? I owe it to him not to deceive him. Oh! Joyce,

you can't think how happy I am! I considered myself engaged long before he asked me in words; we were tacitly engaged, you know. But he undervalued himself so—he was too noble to wish to fetter me."

Poor little bark, with all its pennons streaming, and dreaming only of unclouded sunshine! —who could have the heart to hint at possible rocks, when it was so ready to be happily launched? Not Jocelyn, though she was rather scornful at so unwonted a display of feeling, and her sister's excitement seemed only to perplex her.

"Such a little makes her happy!" she thought, as Elsie continued,

"Poor dear mamma, she thinks I might have made a better match; but she won't trouble much about it. I think she becomes more and more indifferent every day about everything but her health; and that was one thing which made me feel I didn't want to remain exactly as I am. Oh! Joyce, it is such a new feeling to know you are all in all to some one you can really care for."

"You have so many serious things to think about," answered Jocelyn, suddenly stopping the torrent of love-words, and reckless of the fact that her abruptness was hurting Elsie, "that I won't disturb you any more at present."

And then, in her old fashion, she made her escape into the park, to see the frost sparkling on the leafless trees, and to hear the old voices speaking to her as when she was a child. Alas, they had ceased to speak! She found it difficult to reflect back the sunshine of the outer world. Everything looked altered; but it was herself that was changed, for spirit and matter are inextricably blended. Love is the only preservative against the withering of the heart—a love which depends on its own inexhaustible spring, and not on the poverty of the soil through which it passes. But an entire loss of that love seemed to be coming upon Jocelyn, and she could no longer persuade herself that her isolation was any proof of mental superiority. She was conscious of a change of feeling, even with regard to her sister. Her heart felt, as the French say, *serré*, shut in away from

Heaven as well as from earth. She could not warm herself at the embers of her smouldering faith.

"Why," she thought, "was I ever allowed to meet this man? I was tranquil at least, if not happy, before. He has destroyed my illusions. The ghosts of my dead joys are haunting me everywhere."

She hated him in his absence, and yet when he returned he brought the glamour back with him.

He looked at her with lucid, steady eyes, but every fresh look was a separate stab to her. He took her hand, as a brother might have taken it. She dropped his suddenly as if it scalded her. Then she rattled off into common-places —wretched and sacrificing—yet grudging the sacrifice every moment. She thought him heartless to forget her so lightly, and he intended no deception, but imposed upon himself.

All went well to outward observers, and Elsie, who met her affianced husband with eyes glistening and melting, and lips quivering into a tender smile, could not guess that his heart

remained unaffected. Still less could Jocelyn guess it, as she stood by very hungry and lonely, watching her sister looking radiantly lovely, and simply wrapt up in the sense of Lyle's presence.

"How admirably suited they are to each other, after all, and what a mistake I made in thinking that he would ever miss me," she thought, with sharp throbs of pain, which could not be repressed. "Their spirits are in unison. *I* brought them together, and I am shivering alone in the desolation outside."

And yet, after a time, it struck her that there was a change also in Lyle, that he was weaker than ever in will, that his heart was more and more encrusted with egotism and unbelief, and that he had begun to attach more importance to the physical enjoyments of life. The idea *did* occur to her, though she attempted to put it from her, that this man, who prided himself on his moral scruples, was by no means impeccable himself in the matter of honour. It was bad enough for her to be unable to witness his contentment in Elsie's presence, without a

painful contraction at her own heart, but it was worse to be forced to dread being left alone with him, and to be compelled, after a time, to avoid an actual collision of glances, lest he should guess the unspoken anguish of her mind. Was this partly her own fault? She tried to hope it was not, and then again tried to make an excuse for herself by thinking that the foreign blood in her veins might offer some excuse for her inconsistent irritability.

"I am a bad actor," she thought. "I might have known that I should be. Elsie is one of the women of the ethereal type, incapable of wrong-doing, but I—I have a fever in my veins, a sort of tropical fire about me, I sometimes think."

On one afternoon in the beginning of December, when Lyle and Elsie were sitting together with locked hands, and when it was too early for candles to be lighted, Jocelyn was asked to play and sing to them. At first she tried to excuse herself from complying with the request, but she did so at last with only too much effect.

They were united and happy, she thought, *she*

was unhappy and alone. And forgetting everything but the fact of her loneliness, she was soon so absorbed in her music that her face wore an expression they had never seen in it before. She lingered at the piano, her fingers creeping listlessly over the keys, till at last she wandered into Gluck's "Che faro!" The whole passion of her nature found vent in the words, and when she concluded Lyle Fenwick had risen. He was standing near the instrument, and she could hear the hurried sound of his breathing, as she glanced up for one instant, and caught the look in his eyes. There was something in the look that made her heart stand still. But she rallied her strength at once, as he said, with that huskiness of tone which betrays a deeper feeling than the speaker intends,

"You are not happy!"

"Oh! yes—of course—I am wonderfully happy," she answered, with a strange intonation, as she glanced remorsefully at Elsie.

"You have something on your mind! Why don't you tell us?"

"Because it would not interest you," she answered, in her most chilling voice.

"I am afraid you must have some sad associations, which are roused by that song."

She pressed her lips tightly together, and her blood tingled as she answered, proudly,

"I hate associations. One place is as good as another, and one memory as good as another."

"Humph! I cannot understand it, *after what you told me*," he continued, lowering his voice.

"What I told you once, I *said for always*," she answered, still more haughtily, repressing the passionate, too-expressive answer which rose to her lips.

"Are you two dealing in enigmas?" asked Elsie, as she looked from one to the other with the heightened colour still on her cheeks, and the little half-smile of full content still parting her lips.

"Cross questions and crooked answers again," answered Lyle Fenwick lightly, as Jocelyn made some slight excuse for hurrying to her own room, where she threw herself, in an agony of humiliation, on her knees.

"What taint of self-deception," she thought, "lurks in my nature! Can I so far forget my-

self, and yet try to pray? Can I cure one hypocrisy by another?"

She moaned as she knelt, attempting a bitter analysis of self, but only cutting the nerves which she hoped to strengthen.

After this, her difficulties increased. She began to blame Lyle Fenwick bitterly for his conduct, and she could no longer drive back into her own heart the impetuous wish to teach Elsie to view him in his true colours.

On a day when the trees in Dyneford Park were shrouded with a thick fall of snow, and when Jocelyn had ventured into the keen, biting air on a mission of mercy to one of her poor people, she determined suddenly to make the attempt. That morning, bad news had been received from Hugo. The dead, shadowless white of the snow seemed to have something ghastly and spectral about it, as if death, and not life, were the law of the world. Jocelyn shivered when she came in, her cheeks mottled with cold, and the white, powdery substance blown over her serge dress, as she smiled a wan smile at Elizabeth, who was prac-

tising a waltz on the drawing-room piano. A sudden impulse seized her; she went to her sister and kissed her. She had not often done so of late.

"What is the matter?" asked Elsie, more languidly than usual. "You look, as the Scotch say, 'raised' sometimes. I wonder if it is selfish of me to feel as if I cannot think much even about Hugo? I never did see the use of worry."

"Worry! Why should *you* worry? All the good gifts of life seem to fall to your share."

"*All* the good gifts!" she answered, with childish fitfulness. "Jocelyn, you are mocking me. I wish I was a blue. I shall read by-and-by, and steady down into a sober matron; but I sometimes think it would have been better for Lyle's happiness if he could have liked some clever girl—like you, for instance,—who could have been more an equal to him. I do not know half the time what you two are talking about."

"Nonsense! Elsie," she returned, hastily; "you overvalue his intellect. He is just one

of those 'promising men' who would generally be pronounced by judges of character to be very unlikely to justify the brilliant prophecies which have been hazarded about their future. He needs energy; *you* must give it to him."

"How can I?" she whispered, all her innocent raptures chilled. "He is so infinitely above me! If I only knew a little of what he knows!—or if I could only look into his face and feel sure that he was contented! When I talk to him, he seems to be in a dream."

So already the serpent had entered Elsie's Paradise. There was silence for one moment between the sisters, and Elsie, having reached a climax which, with women of her stamp, had only one natural result, burst into tears. The tears sent Jocelyn's resolutions to the winds.

"That is often a cold heart," she thought to herself, "which can fall most vehemently in love, and Lyle is no exception to the rule; his strong fancies make him selfish."

But aloud, she said,

"Silly child! Don't you know that there are always these little ups and downs in court-

ship? I hate long engagements, and I should say that your wedding ought to take place soon; there is no possible reason for delay."

"What a mighty hurry you are in to get rid of me!" answered Elsie, smiling through her tears.

And Jocelyn's impatience after this to expedite matters was a topic of amusement to others of the family.

CHAPTER II.

"A GREEN Yule," said our forefathers, "makes a fat kirkyard;" but the adage seems to be reversed in our days, and the white and frosty days which his rustic neighbours called "seasonable" were already telling on Mr. Delmott's constitution. Hitherto, Jocelyn had cared little for her father—but now the sympathy of suffering seemed to be drawing them together; and if Jocelyn needed a counter-irritant to prevent her from dwelling exclusively on her personal vexations, that counter-irritant was supplied by Mr. Delmott's condition.

The owner of Dyneford Park had begun to talk about expenses, and had determined to sell off some of his horses when the hunting season was over. Tidings of his son's conduct had

reached his ears from Oxford which realized all his worst anticipations. He heard of recklessness, of debt, and of dissipation, and he began to prophesy that Hugo could never face his examination. It was only Jocelyn who, midst her other troubles, could mourn over her brother, and make excuses for him, feeling that he had been exposed to strong temptations, with no early influences to act favourably on his character.

"If he had been managed wisely from the first, it might have been so different! And now all the good in him has run to seed before its time," she thought, with characteristic impatience. Poor Hugo! he had never been able to picture a mother in prayer for him! His tastes had been forced into unnatural channels, and he had been alternately petted and bullied from childhood," she would add to herself, as the mist of tears came before her eyes, and as she remembered that *her* pleading had always been powerless to affect him.

He was weak, idle, effeminate, and vain. She had watched anxiously for any signs of a better

life beginning in him. Yet he was her brother, and she would not despair. Ralph Delmott's son was a type of creature for whom the father had a sober English dislike; but the elder sister's love had the element of maternal affection in it still, and it was owing to Jocelyn's pleadings that the scapegrace was received at Dyneford in the vacation, in a manner which made him allow he was "quite taken aback by the governor's unexampled benignity." It was a critical time in Hugo's life—one in which the future seemed to depend on the manner in which he determined to act. For he attained his majority during that Christmas vacation, and a few festivities were inevitable on the occasion.

The forbearance of his relations seemed to have impressed him a little, for on the evening of his birthday, when the rejoicings were over, he grumbled to Jocelyn, as he met her in the corridor—

"What a lot of absurd and hollow rubbish they did talk, to be sure! A hideous contrast between what I am and what they would make

me. If they knew what a wretched beggar I am, how they would detest me!"

There was a dull glitter in his eye which told its own tale as well as the shaking of the hand; and Jocelyn exclaimed indignantly,

"Hugo, you have been drinking! What a wicked and degrading thing for a man of your age to do!—and on such a day as this, too! No wonder that the trash talked on the occasion was horrible to you—your own conscience made it horrible. But what can *we* do to set the trash right? Your relations cannot blacken you."

"Come, shut up!" he said, "and mind your own business. My head's clear enough, whatever I've taken, and you're only a baby. The old boy is playing a false game as well as I, and he knows it. I am not going to truckle to him for the rest of his money."

"I wish you would not call him the 'old boy,'" said Jocelyn, sadly, as she thought of her father's haggard appearance, and how she had connected his changed looks with a certain letter which he had hurriedly slipped into his

pocket when he had received it one morning at the breakfast-table. Was it true, as the gossips said, that Mr. Delmott had been speculating, and had encountered heavy losses? He liked to be his own steward and bailiff, and his family knew little about his affairs. There had always been a difference of opinion about the owner of Dyneford; some people said that he was immensely rich, and others that he deliberately lived beyond his income. All this passed quickly through Jocelyn's mind, as she looked at her brother with dark, earnest eyes, and asked,

"Have you not noticed how ill he seems, and how his illness is connected with your bad conduct?"

"It hasn't *all* to do with any conduct of mine, good, bad, or indifferent; and if it had it can't be helped," he added, repeating that weary shibboleth—that epitaph of dead pasts, that dirge of miserable weakness—with which men of his stamp are wont to comfort themselves.

"*Can't be helped!*" she exclaimed, taking fire

at once. "Oh! Hugo, what a feeble thing for a man to say!—for you *are* a man now, though you call me a baby. And oh, how changed you are! I remember the time when I used to think——"

"Shut up!" he repeated, sullenly, as he crept up the stairs, beginning to realise that Jocelyn was no longer the baby he had pronounced her.

But what was the use of promising amendment? He had talked of amendment a hundred times before, with the apparent intention of redeeming his pledge, but without making any effort towards putting his wishes into practice. And he had often before reproached his sister with her want of that knowledge of the world which means familiarity with the worst side of human nature. She was used to it; she had long reconciled herself to the fact that Hugo could never find his joys where she found hers, and had lately suspected that he preferred the society of women in whose company he could drink and smoke. She loathed the thought of his low associations, yet hitherto

she had always succumbed to his bullying, without knowing the reason why she succumbed to it. But other and stronger influences had come into play, and the time had passed when her brother could cow her as he had once done.

She knew Hugo so well, and was so perfectly aware that his language might at any moment become intemperate, and that the external varnish which made him appear to have a little of the polish of society might at any time crack, that she had continually a nervous dread of what might happen. It was scarcely a surprise, therefore, to her when, a few days afterwards, she met him, with his face pale, and his mouth set with a hard, clenched look, pacing up and down the gravel-walk of the shrubbery.

"What is the matter?" she asked, anxiously. "You will be such a short time at home. Cannot you keep the peace?"

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, angrily. "Can't *you* leave a fellow in peace? Isn't it enough to have the old—the governor, I mean—blowing me up again, without *your* interfering? If it

was anyone else, I should think he was chaffing; but then he wouldn't fly into such a passion about nothing."

"If you mean papa, I never saw him 'fly' into a passion in my life," she answered, in a cold, constrained voice.

"Fly!—no, that's not the word; he's too cold-blooded to fly into an honest rage. He works himself up, like one of Homer's heroes, not exactly by cries and gestures, but by every form of paterfamilias excitement; he forgets that I am no longer a petticoated youngster, to be terrified by his Bombastes Furioso harangues, and wants me to marry, indeed!—that's the burden of his song. I have no doubt that the Dyneford ladies have spotted me as their prey. They want a man of property, of family connection, and go;" and the bold, self-satisfied expression so repulsive to his sister crept over the young man's features.

"I don't see anything so unnatural, if he *does* want you to marry," answered Jocelyn, slowly. "You are his heir, I suppose, and I—I begin to fear that he will never shake off the

weakness which seems to be creeping over him. I scarcely know how to venture on any advice; you know I was born a left-handed woman; but, if I were you—well, I think I would try to wash my hands altogether of the things of the past, and begin again with a clean slate."

"Exactly—get into fresh harness, instead of muddling myself with Greek and Latin. I had some idea of working in order to pass, but henceforth you wish my 'only books to be women's looks.' Well, supposing I have already anticipated your wish?" he added, looking at her with the bold, dare-devil expression still in his face.

What did he mean? For a moment she feared to ask him, with that unutterable loathing for low degrading mysteries which every pure-minded girl must feel.

"I thought you told father that you had no entanglement, and now you talk about having anticipated his wish," she answered slowly. "Have you met anyone in society for whom you have a fancy?"

"Whom do you meet in 'society,'" he re-

turned, in an altered tone, "but first-class young women, who whisper bitter things of each other? I saw plenty of Belgravian and Tyburnian girls last time I was in town, and, to tell you the truth, I detest them. I didn't want my wife to be bursting with envy and all uncharitableness."

"I hate mystery," she answered. "Wherever there is mystery, there must be something wrong to hide."

"Do you think so? I may as well go wrong one way as another, But your tongue will get you into trouble one of these days if it is so sharp."

"It is very easy for anyone to take the downward path," she said, looking at him sadly, in a way which he did not understand.

"Thank you," he answered scornfully. "I think it is *you* who are altered. I had counted on your help—you ought to be true to me, at all risks."

"I have always been true to you, and I am true to you still. But don't impose any fresh burdens upon me now—I have enough of my

own," she implored, glancing at him with a sort of terror in her velvety eyes.

"Well, supposing I am likely to marry some one who might not exactly suit your old-fashioned ideas—some one, in fact——"

"Who is beneath you in station. You know what the world would think of the shame of a *mésalliance;* and you know, too, that the Delmott pride would never overlook any disparity of that kind," she interrupted, hurriedly.

"Tut! nonsense! you are thinking of something disreputable which you have a right to denounce from the vantage-ground of virtue. But though my wife has been talked about—it is the fate of all actresses—she has done nothing to be ashamed of. She was alone and unprotected, and I took the responsibility upon me of protecting her. She was not an adventuress, but the daughter of an Italian nobleman—La Ginetta, they called her—Adelina Ginetta."

"Your *wife!*" echoed Jocelyn, thinking of the boy's visit to the Continent, and the easy way

in which he might have been entrapped by a designing woman. Her head seemed to buzz, and shoot with a curious confused idea that she had known of it all along.

"Keep it dark for the present," he continued, speaking in a low voice. "Our plans are not ripe enough for disclosure just yet. I married her in the Long Vacation, when I met her in Paris. It is not so easy to obtain such a triumph as she did in a good many of the continental cities. But I never saw any one surpass her in beauty. I did much as my father did, you know, after all. He married a foreigner, and I am half a foreigner myself. I defy anyone in the world to prove his right to reproach me."

"That depends on your own conscience. This no doubt is the way in which your money goes, so that one thing leads to another," answered Jocelyn, with whitened cheeks. "But you will never be able to keep it a secret. Things of this sort come out, and if I am questioned, what can I say? It is never an easy thing for one person to deceive; and for

two it is worse. *You* can't bury your lie—it shows even in your face. I knew something was the matter directly I saw you. For you are not happy, Hugo—you are miserable in your marriage."

He turned on her like a wild creature.

"Who said I meant to hide it? It may be war to the knife with the governor before long, and then of course I *must* tell him, or leave you to tell him. The sooner he knows the better, if it comes to that, even if he cuts me out of his will. But please to hazard no conjectures about my private affairs."

* * * * * * *

The war which Hugo had predicted came sooner than he expected. For on the following morning, early, before the household was astir, Jocelyn was roused by a tap at her door. She woke with a sudden start, as though she had been shot, and hurrying to the door, opened it a little way, with a face from which all the morning freshness had suddenly been blanched. Hugo stood at it smoking, with an assumption

of his usual indifferent manner, but his hand shook as he explained—

"I've had another row with the governor, that's all about it, and I'm off by the early train."

"Why, term doesn't begin till to-morrow fortnight."

"It's of no consequence. I can't stay here," he said, with a long puff at his pipe. "He has threatened to ruin me, and I believe he intends it."

In a few minutes Jocelyn, in a loose wrapper, with hair knotted at the back of her head, entered the room where her brother was pretending to breakfast. His back was turned to her as she came in, and he was staring at the fire, but the heaving of the shoulders showed that he was deeply agitated. By his side stood half a tumbler of brandy, which he had been drinking pure. She gently took it and emptied it out of a window, while he stared as gloomily as ever at the fire. She took his hand. It felt quite cold, yet his face was flaming hot.

"That stuff is poison," she said. "Poisonous

to most men, and doubly and trebly so to *you*."

"Why?" he asked, with his usual veiled insolence of manner.

"Because you have fire in your veins already, and because you are so young; you and I too, for the matter of that—though I begin to feel so old already."

"Is it *I* who have made you old?" he asked again, with a slight touch of remorse, which showed itself in his voice.

"If my nature were thoroughly upright, it ought to quail under the shock of a late discovery, I suppose," she answered, with a sigh. "And if my own integrity were spotless, perhaps I might shrink from the remembrance that I had been deceived," she continued, more sadly. "But you are flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone, and how do I know that I stand on any higher platform than you?"

"You speak enigmatically and sentimentally, and you used to talk with all the vigour of epigram. I cannot quite make you out," he said, studying her for a few moments in silence. "I suppose if *you* had anything to tell, as I had

last night, instead of making a clean breast of it at once, you would let it out in driblets?"

"Don't try to make me out," she answered, hurrying about to make arrangements for his journey. "Think about yourself."

But when the dogcart and portmanteau were well out of sight, she hurried up again to her bed-room, drew down the blinds, and tried in vain, as she closed her eyes, and attempted to settle herself to sleep, to persuade herself that there was no use in crying over spilt milk.

CHAPTER III.

NO news were received from Hugo after his sudden departure. No communication passed between father and son for weeks, and to prevent the possibility of a public exposure, Mr. Delmott, at the expiration of the first week, dreading that Hugo, in his desperation, might take steps which might prove still more prejudicial to his interests in the future, determined to make the excuse of his own state of health for taking his son's name off the books of the University. Then, and not till then, came the full revelation of the prodigal's extravagance, and Hugo's name had to be spoken with bated breath.

During these days Jocelyn could scarcely eat. The slightest morsel seemed to choke her, as, morning after morning, her father sat over the

numerous bills and the bewildering letters which the post was sure to bring him, wiping his forehead with shaking hands, and trying to see with dazed eyes. Jocelyn could only guess the worst. It had been whispered that Hugo had borrowed from money-lenders, and that there had been something more than usually dishonourable in these transactions; it had been also said, pretty openly even at Dyneford, that young Delmott had run riot to an extent really unusual, and that what his father chose to term his "removal" from Oxford, was in reality only one way of hushing up the inevitable expulsion. His sister believed all these reports, but believed also in the sacrifice of the good to the bad, which, as she argued, was the law of all religion, and did not despair of reclaiming the scapegrace. Mr. Delmott had always kept his women-folk in the dark, but his eldest daughter's was not the nature of a dog or a beast of burden. Her opinion was not necessarily to be guided by her father's, and her silence, as she told herself, was only a question of time. She knew that she must soon break

forth into passionate persuasion, and the time for that persuasion was not long in coming.

In his irritable excitement and unusual depression, Mr. Delmott had disregarded the injunction of his medical adviser, and had exposed himself unnecessarily to changes of weather, and Mrs. Delmott was helpless and miserable as usual when her husband was seized with an attack of rheumatic gout.

All was commotion and anxiety in the house, Jocelyn being the only member of the family who, besides the paid nurse, was admitted to her father's sick-room. The task of waiting upon him and trying to amuse him, was resigned by common consent to her, the more readily because the violence of the invalid's temper terrified the other women, and kept them at a distance. Jocelyn was alternately praised and stormed at when the pain abated. Mr. Delmott would have her to sit by his side, and wonder that she so willingly gave up her time to wait upon him. But when the paroxysm returned, he would order her out of his sight, and all his old aversion to her seemed to return.

Nevertheless they were growing nearer to each other day by day. The pent-up affection in the daughter's nature naturally found a vent for itself, all the more easily that she was beginning to think differently of her father's behaviour to her dead mother. For there were hours during the delirium of his illness, when time seemed to be annihilated, and when in the confusion of his stricken brain he had spoken lovingly to Jocelyn, taking her for that dead mother, dark haired like herself. And during those hours of pitiful conversation, she began, for the first time, to have a tender feeling for the suffering and bitter disappointment which had thwarted the better part of her father's nature in that sorrowful episode of his earlier life. She learnt, for the first time, to make excuses for the peculiarity and even occasional eccentricity which had always been observable in his character, and which had latterly been developed by his illness. She girded herself up to do the thing which she had to do, and if possible to touch the secret spring of his trouble. Hugo's name had been forbidden, but she

forced herself to mention it, as soon as her father was pronounced convalescent.

"I will tell you the truth," he said, clenching his hands. "He's an utterly unprincipled irredeemable blackguard, a worthless scamp; I have washed my hands of him."

"Oh father!" she answered, putting her hands to her ears. "If you speak of him like that, you will drive him to desperation."

"It is not fit for you to talk about him," he continued in the same strain, with his mouth set firmly as a rock. "He has drained me of thousands, and he will continue to drain me. I am crippled everywhere, through him."

"At any rate he is your heir; he is the head of the family," she answered, with a flash in her eyes.

"No, he is not, if I choose to disinherit him. There is no empty title, I am thankful to say, attached to this house, or otherwise I would force him to cut off the entail. He has disgraced the family; he is a gambler and a drunkard, fond of low society—you should not ask about such things."

"You have not heard from him lately; are you not anxious?" she continued, nothing abashed.

"I have heard *of* him, if not from him," he said, with a bitter laugh; "he is recreating himself in town with the money of which he robbed me. Looking after his horse, taking a turn in Rotten Row, listening to Patti at the Opera, or looking in at the common music-halls. Oh, I shall hear from him soon enough, when his funds are exhausted!"

Had he heard *all*, then? He was terribly near the truth, and the truth, as Jocelyn believed, would kill him, when he did happen to hear it. The hot colour rushed over her face as she said, in a low voice.

"Are none of us to be forgiven if we once go astray? What, then, is to become of the doctrine of repentance—of the Christian religion itself? Papa, you forget that he is young—very young indeed."

She could not soften him. He answered angrily,

"He is old enough to have become a very

black sheep, and must be washed a few shades lighter before he is admitted amongst us. I decline to discuss the subject with you. Why, there is even a paragraph in the *Telegraph* about him, headed, 'The Extravagance of an Undergraduate.' But you can't expect a woman to understand it."

It seemed to be of no use to continue the conversation. And yet, there were certain questions which the girl wanted to ask, relative to the present state of her father's affairs. She had put off asking them, but her instinct told her it would be better if she could do so at once. She was less than satisfied about the state of his health, and she felt that his mind might be relieved if he could be induced to confide in her more fully. But the opportunity was not yet. It had turned out much as Mr. Delmott had prophesied. After a certain time Hugo wrote home for money, and moderate sums were sent to him through Mr. Delmott's lawyer. But now it appeared that the boy had still managed to deny his marriage, and no one dared to give the Squire information of the fact. The shame of acknow-

ledging that her brother had been convicted in a lie would alone have led Jocelyn to hush up his want of truth. But she had more serious fears as to the probable effect on her father's health.

And so weeks passed on, in the same dreary manner. In the month of March, Mr. Delmott was pronounced decidedly better, and the following May was talked of as convenient for Elsie's wedding. Jocelyn wondered, but dared not ask for an explanation.

One night, after a day's absence to a neighbouring town, on a visit to his lawyer, as Jocelyn suspected, Mr. Delmott returned home, harassed and weary, with deep lines of suffering under his eyes, and an unusual amount of nervous irritability. His elder daughter had often now to bear the brunt of his vexation, and on her he vented his angry mood. But when they separated for the evening, and when Elsie and her mother had already gone to their rooms, Mr. Delmott's good night to Jocelyn was more than usually affectionate, as if he would efface the remembrance of past unkindness.

Jocelyn's heart beat fast; she had one of the

impulses by which her conduct was often guided; and not stopping to think of how he would take it, she threw her arms suddenly round her father. It was the first time she ever remembered to have done so in her life, but she was not prepared for what followed. He pushed her rudely from him. His face worked convulsively, and then, seeming to lose all command over himself, he burst into tears. There are few things so terrible as witnessing the unwonted emotion of an otherwise reserved man, and Jocelyn afterwards thought of that exceptional instance of her father's grief as if it were too shocking to be forgotten.

She turned away her face, from a secret instinct that such sorrow was too sacred for intrusion. But presently he looked up, and spoke in a tone of assumed cheerfulness—

"Can you stand fire, Joyce? How much can you really bear? You have not been much used to shot and shell, and yet you have been cruelly neglected, my poor child! I have never done my duty by you."

"Tell me the worst, and do not speak so," said the girl, with a ready smile.

She did not think she could hear anything to make her change colour; she had already a pretty accurate suspicion of the miserable reality beneath the outward glitter and show.

"Sit fast, then," said he, striving to keep up the same jocular manner, which showed her, more than anything else, the depth of his sadness.

She remained still, putting a strain upon every nerve, and feeling as if she could have had her arm cut off without so much as an exclamation of pain.

A blank stupor came over his face, which gave way to a look of despair.

"I can't tell you," he said. "I haven't the heart to do it; if I had not been thrown amongst such a nest of scamps—if that wretched boy—I could curse him——"

"Hush, papa!—oh! papa," said Jocelyn, clinging to him, and putting her hand over his mouth, "have pity, and consider that his temptations are stronger than other people's; he may fall into frightful wrong, where another might keep clear from very indifference, but he is still your son."

"Mine!" he exclaimed, in the heat of his passion, as he almost shook her off—"and the son of——" and then he recollected himself and stopped.

Even then she forgave, for he had not alluded in words to her mother. She tried to ignore it, though she could have shrieked aloud, and said quietly,

"I know you would be sorry for it, if you said anything too severe. Hugo's faults are on the surface; he is his own worst enemy. We may hate his vices, but we must love himself."

"Go to bed—you are tired," he answered, relapsing into his old reserve.

But she was not to be so put off.

"Tell me what you were going to tell me," she pleaded; "you do me an injustice by never trusting me."

"We are *ruined*, then, if you really want to know the truth," he said, speaking in slow, deliberate tones. "I have lost nearly everything at one stroke—everything but the landed property, which may be divided between you at my death."

Jocelyn started. For the moment ruin did seem to be an appalling word—not for herself, but for those weaker ones whom it might involve in suffering. But she recovered herself instantly, and remained still as a statue, with her head bent, as if still waiting for the thunderbolt to come.

"Your honour is unstained?" she asked, after a pause, in the same dry, mechanical tone in which he himself had spoken.

"Thank heaven!" he answered, indignantly, with a return of his old pride, "I have not fallen so low as that."

"And none suffer but ourselves through your misfortunes?"

"None—what are you thinking of?"

She heaved a deep sigh of blessed relief, and then said, "Thank God!" for she had feared so much worse. She had heard that her father had often made speculations blindly in his early youth, and that a sort of luck had seemed to sustain and help him out of the most adverse chances; and knowing it was likely enough that, for the sake of his son, he might have

tried new investments in his advancing years, she feared that others might have been led into like imprudence.

"Are you in your senses, child?" cried her father, his anger rising to a climax. "Do I not tell you that I have half beggared you through my own carelessness? There was that Russian Stock, which appeared to be so promising," he maundered on; "it was one of those unaccountable cases of fluctuation—falling down, down, till the shares were as valueless as a bit of waste paper; and now the last bit of news I have had is a serious and overwhelming calamity—you can't expect girls to understand—but the breaking of that bank—Carlton and Carlton—a house I should have thought as safe as any in England. I don't believe I shall ever see a penny of the money I had there."

"Is there no chance of their retrieving?"

"No; they have made frantic efforts—there is nothing to be done, and I—why, the larger bulk of my property is gone, and it would be grossly unprincipled to borrow on such meagre

capital. They call me a wealthy man, but the truth must come out soon. I am an embarrassed and needy one. I expect I shall be unable to pay off my liabilities, unless I make up my mind to sell Dyneford, and even then we may only realise a decent maintenance." And his voice sank to a husky whisper, for the trial went to the very marrow of his soul.

"Sell Dyneford!" she repeated, cheerfully—"why, what a good thing it is we *have* it to sell! Please don't mope; I am sure you are ever so much better. What a pity it is you have kept all this to yourself! There is an old proverb, you know, about 'fire that is closest kept.' And, after all, who would fret about mere money, when you say we have enough for a decent maintenance?"

"What a strange girl you are!" he said, looking at her in utter astonishment. "Why cannot you talk like other people?"

"And how would you have me talk?" she answered, with the same attempt at gaiety. "I cannot pretend to think all this so terrible. How much worse it would have been if your

health had quite failed! Think of all the blessings you have left. Elsie will soon be happily married to a tolerably rich man; and as for me, I rather think I shall like to be a little poorer—though, after all, you know, it is nonsense to talk like that, when I shall have a larger portion than falls to the lot of many other girls who are better than I am. And really I often think we don't properly understand, as long as we are in this life, what is great and what is small. 'Bright things,' they say, 'are better seen in gloom.'"

He listened to her with a sort of patient bewilderment, as she rattled on like this, with her excitable fancy. Then the anxious lines relaxed on his face, and at last he smiled, possibly with amusement at her ignorance.

"You are a true sunbeam, Jocelyn," he said; "*you* should have been my son, for you have the courage of a man, if you have the heart of a woman."

Praise was beginning to be sweet from him, though she looked upon flattery in general as a low retail business. She could tolerate the ex-

aggerated language of this new love, though it only brought to light her keenly-felt deficiencies. Mr. Delmott took his impressions slowly, but held them with tenacity when they once were formed. Having learnt to appreciate this newly-found daughter, it was a relief to him to discuss arrangements with her. After a time he fell asleep sitting in his arm-chair, whilst Jocelyn knelt beside him, holding his hand in hers, and not daring to stir, for fear of waking him. At last she managed to steal away, giving instructions to the servants.

It was impossible for her to rest during the remainder of that night. With an exaggerated power of self-reproach, she looked back over past years, when her father had been suffering, and when she had nursed a sense of injury which parted him from herself. I know nothing in life so painful as these outlooks over lost opportunities which the sharpness of our regret can never recall.

And Jocelyn dared not look forward to the future. She was making every pretence for avoiding Lyle Fenwick, and yet even these pretences were hateful to herself.

"I hate all these little expedients!" she thought. "It is cruel to have to act in Elsie's presence. No woman can ever be worth thinking of who is ever so little false."

Tired from want of sleep on the following day, she fled to her natural resource, the music which had often beguiled the melancholy of her mobile nature. Elsie was shopping with her mother at Dyneford, and Jocelyn had the drawing-room piano to herself. She had just worked herself up into the intricacies of a fugue, when Lyle Fenwick walked in, as he often did, unannounced.

Jocelyn was expending too much of her pent-up feeling in the difficulties of Bach to be at all aware that anyone had come into the room. At first he thought of stealing away without interrupting her, and then he began to watch the music mirrored in her face. It was taking an unfair advantage of her to linger unnoticed; but the temptation was too great for him when, after the fugue was ended, Jocelyn placed her hands lightly on the keys, and commenced the first trembling measures of an exquisite melo-

dy. He held his breath lest he should lose a note of the song, but he could not remove his eyes from the singer.

Jocelyn's attitude was graceful, because it was unstudied. It was a day late in March, and there was an unnatural warmth about the air, like the first breath of the approaching Spring. She had felt it to be oppressive, and had opened the window, so that her long dark hair was just stirred by the breeze. Her sleeve had fallen back, and he noticed the roundness of the arm, and the sensitive delicacy of the beautifully-modelled hand. The thoughtful eyes were dreamy with emotion. It was like a vision, in which Lyle forgot all the barriers which had been interposed by the past, and suffered himself to be beguiled by new and delicious hopes. He scarcely knew what he was doing when he suddenly grasped her arm, and said, in a hoarse voice,

"Why do you persist in doing violence to yourself, as well as to me? Your sincerity was so genuine, your simplicity of heart so rare! Why do you injure yourself by this monstrous idea of self-sacrifice?"

She started like a sleep-walker suddenly awakened, looked at him with fear and horror in her face, and tore herself free.

"Why do *you* speak to me in riddles?" she cried, when she had recovered herself sufficiently. "Elsie is not here. Keep your enigmas for her presence."

He withdrew, when she started back from him, with an inward and angry groan; but his broad muscular hand—"great ugly hand," as Elsie had called it—was grasping the back of a fragile chair as if he would shiver it in pieces.

"We have a destiny which we must fulfil together," he said; "our paths cross, and are entangled. By what infatuation will you persist in keeping up this fiction about your sister?—for that it *is* a fiction we both know. She is beautiful, but she is nothing to me."

"I only wonder how she could fix her heart on a thing so base," answered Jocelyn, placing her fingers again on the keys, and affecting to be once more engrossed with her music.

"Ah! I wronged you," he continued, passionately "when I spoke of self-sacrifice; and

yet, is it better to suppose that the one woman I cared for is acting crookedly for no conceivable purpose, than that she is spoiling three lives for what is merely a caprice? Till I met you, I used not to believe that any man or woman ever did, or ever will, intentionally perform an act of absolute self-sacrifice—that is to say, hurt himself without any reason. That any human creature ever acted otherwise than in obedience to what was, for the time, his strongest wish, used to be as inconceivable to me as the assertion that two straight lines enclosed a space. And now I return to my old belief. I doubt if you have it in you to care for anyone. I have long known that you deceived me when you hinted at a prior engagement, and I am now at a loss to discover the object of your deceit."

"Go!" she said authoritatively, when he had ended, her eyes glittering with tears, but her hand pointing to the door. "Don't say another word. How dare you remain here? Go instantly; for, as I reminded you before, Elsie is absent, and I should be sullied and

lowered to the very depths of degradation if I listened to such words as these in her absence."

He attempted no explanation, but silently left her. Once in the garden, he felt faint, as if from illness, and was dimly aware that he staggered as he walked.

"It is all over," he said. "She is right, as she always is; and I have made her hate me for ever."

CHAPTER IV.

JOCELYN sat for some minutes alone. She felt too stupefied for her anger to continue. Was nothing to protect her from these constant indignities? How long would Mrs. Delmott and Elsie be away? She had not seen her father at all that morning—not, as she remembered now, since the conversation of the previous evening; and in the interval the post had arrived, and she was always anxious about him at post-time. She decided at once to go and look for him, feeling as if she should be safer in his presence. She was not much surprised to hear that he was in his bed-room, for, since his former illness, he had been unusually careful of his health, and after a disturbed night, he breakfasted in his own apartments, and sometimes did not leave them till

eleven o'clock. But, in her present mood, it would have been rather a comfort than otherwise to be allowed to spend her time by anyone's sick-bed.

She knocked for admittance. There was no answer, and, opening the door gently, she saw her father lying, quite dressed, but with his eyes closed, upon his bed. Mr. Delmott's bed-room was in the old part of the house. The blinds were drawn down now, and the room looked dim and ghastly with its heavy cornices, its massy oaken beams, and cumbrous, antique furniture. She began to feel a sort of superstitious dread. Was her father asleep? She crept nearer to him, and immediately recognised a peculiar appearance which she fancied she had seen once or twice before, and which she had intended to mention privately to the doctor who attended him. She did not wish to alarm anyone, but that appearance was so marked at the present moment that she determined to send without loss of time to Mr. Bruton, and tell him of the occasional blackness of the lips, and the flashes

of pallor which she had noticed on former occasions shooting across her father's face. Was there anything to account for it at the present moment? Yes, as she approached the bedside, she saw there was a letter—the much-dreaded letter in Hugo's handwriting—lying crumpled up by her father's side. How much had Hugo told him of the truth? Her heart seemed to stand still as she asked herself the alarming question, and looked for the answer in Mr. Delmott's face. For just at that moment the invalid opened his eyes, and she noticed at once the strange appearance in them, with white circles round the cornea. He looked at Jocelyn with a dull stare, the eyes seeming to be arrested by something in her face.

"I ventured to come in," she faltered. "I was a little alarmed about you. I did not think it could be necessary for me to be shut out."

He turned his face away a little, but still gazed covertly at his daughter, at the firm lines of the mouth, and the full development of her form, and as he did so his lips quivered.

"Are you tired?" she continued. "We must ring at once for some wine. Stay, I have the keys. I can get it faster myself. And don't you think we had better hurry the lunch?"

He did not answer her, but still gazed at her with dumb signs. It was a painful gaze on both sides, in the inscrutable isolation of suffering humanity.

"Bring something to put over you?" she answered, interpreting the appealing look. "Why, the day is very warm. Is it possible you are cold?" And then for the first time she remarked the sound of his laboured breathing.

She thought of the many things she wished to ask him. Much was weighing on her mind with reference to the conversation of the previous evening, and a horrible dread shot across her that possibly Death might keep its secrets, and carry the answer into irrevocable silence. She put a warm covering over him, and then fled down the stairs, with orders to saddle the swiftest horse, and send to Dyneford for the medical man. They answered her with the

information that Mr. Fenwick was still in the garden, with his horse waiting for him outside, and that he would make Mr. Bruton understand the urgency of the case.

"Let him go," said Jocelyn, "as quick as ever he can," forgetting everything that had happened in her anxiety about the present. It took her but a few instants to take out the wine, and hasten upstairs with it, followed by the frightened housekeeper.

In the interval Mr. Delmott had raised himself from his recumbent position, and was sitting almost upright, supported by pillows. His chest was heaving, his eyes wide open, as if they were looking at vacancy, and the purple flush was deeper on his cheeks. Jocelyn hurried to him, and supported his head on her shoulder.

"The brandy, Lawson, the brandy!" she said, beneath her breath. "Pour it out quick!"

"Oh! miss, oh! miss. Heaven have mercy on us all!" said the woman, bursting into a flood of helpless tears.

"Smile!" said Jocelyn, seizing her arm and frightening her by the same authoritative tone

which but a few minutes before she had used to Lyle Fenwick, and forcing all the time a smile on her own trembling lips—a set stereotyped smile, such as girls are apt to force in ball-rooms. She had looked at her father with that flush on his face fading into an awful pallor, and she had listened to that laboured respiration, with the intervals becoming longer and longer. She feared the worst, and yet she smiled. She was praying for him, one of those urgent prayers which we forget to pray for our dear ones whilst we have them with us on earth; and she would not have his passing soul disturbed by hearing a sob of grief from one of those he was leaving behind.

"Papa, dear papa, do you feel cold now?" she asked.

There was no movement of the muscles of the face, he only gazed at her with vague, vacant looks. She repeated the question louder, as she tried to force the brandy to his lips. A strange wave of memory seemed to pass over his face, and he suddenly answered her smile with a flash of recognition. She scarcely caught the mum-

bled words—"Gabrielle—forgive—as I——"

Then she knew that his mind was wandering, and that he had taken her for her mother. Yet he had spoken, and in that there was a shadow of hope. The hope was almost too much for her, and for the first time she began to shake. In a minute more that hope was destroyed. She could just distinguish the words, "My will! my will!" then the chest seemed to cease to heave, the eyes certainly grew duller, and the weight on her shoulder became intolerable.

She did not complain of it, indeed she was scarcely conscious of any local pain, as she remained still in subdued silence, feeling bruised and enfeebled all over.

"Keep the servants away," she said to Mrs. Lawson. "The doctor will be here soon."

The woman had caught the infection of her quietness. They seemed to hear the beating of their own hearts, and in the pause that followed there was a sound of carriage-wheels, followed by a knock at the door.

"Oh! heaven help us!" repeated Mrs. Lawson. "It ain't time for the doctor to get

here yet. It's just poor Missus and Miss Elsie."

Then for the first time Jocelyn moved, and rested her father's head tenderly against the pillows.

"Perhaps, Miss, it's only a faint," whispered the housekeeper, as she renewed her attempts at chafing the hands, and raising the wine to the parted lips, and then shuddered at hearing the chink of the glass against the teeth. Jocelyn did not answer, as she moved wearily across the room, and met her step-mother on the stairs.

"Papa is not well," she said; "but if you leave him to me, Mr. Bruton will be here directly."

Then, noticing Elsie's terrified look, she added, quickly,

"Don't alarm yourself, dear. Take your things off first, and then perhaps presently you may come in and help me."

Her quiet manner reassured them both, as it had before restrained Mrs. Lawson from causing the house to re-echo with hysterical shrieks. The poor woman was still steadily riveted to

the spot, as if she had been galvanized by the strength of Jocelyn's will, and she watched her young mistress creeping back to her post, with just sufficient wits about her to repeat that "Miss had got no heart."

But she changed her mind presently, when, as Jocelyn crept back, the something more than stillness struck coldly on her perceptions. An awful chill went through her, a shuddering curiosity, and the touch of the dead hand seemed to sting her, as if it could communicate ice to her veins.

"Unloose his shirt-collar," she said, hoarsely. "Dash some water in his face."

What was it? Could it be possible that agitation had caused it? Was it paralysis, epilepsy, heart-disease, or what?"

She had not uttered a sigh or shed a tear as yet. But her face was becoming ghastly, and there were bistre circles beneath her eyes. The whole world appeared to her at the moment like a charnel-house of decay, and she seemed to be breathing the pestilential vapour of death.

Alas! the sunrise of faith was far away from

her yet. In this first thrust from the sword of the primal curse, it did not seem possible to believe in the "Resurgam"—the hope so long deferred for aching hearts, which in the agony of this moment appeared to her like a figment of the schoolmen. What comfort could be derived at a time like this from the mere natural religion which she had discussed with Mr. Fenwick? What availed it to remember that the generation and type might still continue, though its individual manifestation might cease? God might mercifully lead her to comprehend His mysteries in His own way, but it would need long teaching before she would be able to believe that death might be a birth to a newer, holier state. For at that first sight of the awful change under such sudden and terrifying circumstances, she was ready to sicken at the sight of the sunlight. She could have wished for a pall to be thrown over nature, and she shuddered as she caught sight of the Spring flowers in the garden.

"Draw them down—we must take all the consequences," she said, as she motioned Mrs.

Lawson to the blinds; and then there seemed to be an interval of oblivion, and she was conscious of nothing till the room was filled with familiar faces.

Mr. Bruton was there examining her father, but she shrank from meeting the eye of final authority which could only convey the irrevocable mandate. And Lyle Fenwick was there, soothing poor terror-stricken Elsie, whilst Mrs. Delmott was being carried away in the arms of her attendants. She heard Mr. Bruton use the words, "Spasmodic rigidity," and heard him discuss the possibility of opening a vein. And then a wild idea shot through her brain that perhaps it was a seizure of a peculiar kind, in which the sensibility of the muscles might for a time be gone; perhaps life might possibly be re-awakened. She looked interrogatively at Mr. Bruton, but she needed not his hopeless shake of the head. Her own common sense told her that there could be no hope, for the warmth had not only deserted the body, but the arms which hung down were beginning to stiffen.

"He has been spared much suffering," said Mr. Bruton, kindly. "See how peaceful is the expression of the face. You did all that could be done—is not that a comfort?"

"No gradual ceasing of existence, no failure of the intellect," interposed Lyle Fenwick. "It is not shocking or horrifying if you look at it in its true light."

The words seemed to mock her, coming from *him*, as if he had said, "See how easy it is to die!"

And yet his, of all natures, was the one to experience that horror and repulsion which refined characters, enervated by luxury, are apt to feel for suffering and gloomy sights.

Was the sight gloomy? She scarcely knew as she looked again at the dead face, at the eyelashes fringing the quiet, closed eyes, at the fine proportions of the forehead, and the halo of grey hair round the waxen features.

She had wronged this dead father for the greater part of her life, and the dead face seemed to reproach her as the living one could not possibly have done. He had died calling upon

[illegible] mother's [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] between him and her mother. Possibly the mother's [illegible] might not have [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. She thought again of the questions she had wished to ask him, for which could never be answered now. It was so hard to mourn the stunted affection, the cold answers, and the austere loss of what was gone by—and yet, in presence of the senseless loss, the irrevocable sense of ill-doing returned to haunt her.

"Go and lie down," said Mr. Brinton, again, watching her with a look of professional concern, for the expression of her face was so unusual that it interested him. "You have overtaxed your strength, and you must not stay here."

She resented what she thought was his tone of interference. Had she not prided herself on her strength and self-reliance? The whole house was disorganised. Mrs. Delmott was helpless. And somebody must write to her brother to come—*somebody* must superintend the necessary arrangements. What absurdity it was to tell her to lie down! She was not like other women

—she was alone in the world, was likely to be always alone, and she must be strong. She dimly saw Elsie—who allowed herself to be supported by Lyle Fenwick, and was weeping on his shoulder, in her natural place—coaxed out of the room. She had no more fears for her sister now. But alas! she was no heroine, and it was difficult to repress a fresh pang at the thought that *she* had cut herself aloof from all possible sympathy, and that nothing could bring *her* the relief of tears. She would wait a minute till she heard that Elsie's grief had abated, for Elsie's health was ever weak, and Jocelyn knew that she needed love and help. All the doctor's skill was needed now by the helpless wife, who was in one fit of hysterics after the other; so that, in the fresh anxiety which followed, Jocelyn was forgotten, and in the interval of waiting, while she was looking on, Mrs. Lawson began to tie a handkerchief round the face of the corpse. This was the climax. A sort of electric shock thrilled through her—a sense of faintness which she might have fought off, or she hoped so, even then. But she was mis-

taken, and, overpowered at last by excitement and fatigue, she felt herself falling, and tried in vain to keep herself from lapsing into unconsciousness. There was a little start on her awakening, but she was too stupefied to recognise at once that she had fainted, though she found herself lying on a sofa in another room, with a few of the servants clustered round the door, and Lyle Fenwick sitting by her side.

Involuntarily she shrank from the expression of his face, and, sinking again on the sofa, tried to forget the outer world.

"What has happened?" she muttered. "Where is Elsie? Have I been dead? It would be better to be dead than to awake to life like this!"

"You have been very ill," he said, "but the worst is over now. I wanted all the time to be of some use to you, but I had not the smallest inkling of how to set about it. You are not so strong as you would have us believe."

"What matter whether I am weak or strong? You must go, or Elsie will think it strange.

Go!" she repeated, in her old authoritative manner.

"No," he answered, "I shall stay, and face the consequences. I cannot be a hypocrite any more."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE.